

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

GRAY SELECTED POEMS

Edited With

*Critical Introduction, Text, Notes, paraphrase and
Explanations, Questions and Answers, etc.*

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Growth and Development of the Romantic Reaction in the Age of Johnson

(a) The Age of Classicism (1660-1798).

The period intervening between 1660, the year of the Restoration of King Charles II marking the decisive birth of a new literary order, and 1778, the date of the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* roughly corresponds to what is known as the 'Age of Classicism'. During this period English writers affected, in varying degrees in their works, admiration of the literary fashion of the ancient classical writers of Greece and Rome. It is also alternatively called the 'Augustan Age,' a term originally derived from the prestige of Latin literature in the time of Emperor Augustus, as applied in the history of English literature to the period of Dryden, Pope and Johnson.

It is customary to make a rough tripartite division of the classical or Augustan age in English literature into three stages, viz., the Age of Dryden (1660-1700); the Age of Pope (1700-1740) and the Age of Johnson (1740-1798) according to the dominant literary figures crystallising in themselves the emotional and intellectual attitude of their respective ages.

(b) The Age of Johnson (1740-1798) and the Romantic Reaction.

The Age of Johnson (1740-1798) was an age of transition occasioned by the invasion of sentimentalism into English

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poetry, i. e., to say the, style of English poetry shifted from 'classic' to the 'romantic', fitfully perhaps, in the twenties at first but more consciously and prominently, after the middle of the century, resulting in the final triumph of 'romanticism'. The transition period means one in which the characteristics of the two schools exist side by side in a progressive series of mixed personalities who form the transition from one to another. From mid-eighteenth century there was an increasingly marked tendency among writers to abandon the literary practice of following the schools of Pope and Johnson, and of responding more and more to a different set of influences which led them to seek fresh subjects, fresh modes of feeling, expression and form.

In vain did Johnson, the die-hard and literary dictator of classicism, try to stem the tide of the new social forces that finally brought about the change in literary fashion. The essence of Augustan literature was that it was integrated with the social life and ideals of the age and it treated, in their natural idiom, the interests of men in society. *The typically Augustan poet was always writing within the social context of the age.* This integration was slowly broken down by disintegrating forces, injected into the social context by certain individuals who were dissatisfied with it in an age of transition. This is the best psychological interpretation of the rise of the poetry of sentiment in the Age of Johnson. "Gray's poetry is a kind of index to the spiritual forces already at work with a few pioneer pre-Romantics, such as, Thomson, Young, Dyer, Shenstone and others, many years "before they found a general outlet" in the latter part of the century. It was an impact between the 'super-ego' (society) versus the 'id' (individual self) as a result of which the latter triumphed over the former. Too long had the social structure dominated over the individual and now it was the turn of the individual to dominate the scene. It was left to Wordsworth and Coleridge to give a clear-cut expression of this change of literary fashion in their "Lyrical Ballads" in 1798.

During the whole of the Age of Johnson his throne as the sole custodian of the classical tradition, so firmly established by Pope, after Dryden's pioneering efforts, was already tottering to its fall, as rebellion and reaction against it were already rife in spite of his attempt to stamp it out. In poetry

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Johnson represented the decaying tradition of Pope and not the poetic aspirations of the rebels of the day in an age of transition. This latter is reflected in the poetry of sentimental reflection (Thomson, Young, etc.) and that of the early Romantics, Gray and Collins, two of the outstanding literary figures of the Age, who were precursors of the Romantic movement. The gradual, though fitful, return to Nature and the advent of naturalism in English poetry, followed by the regular Romantic 'reaction' which led to the final overthrow of classicism, are phases which roughly synchronize with the Age of Gray and Collins, although stirrings of a new style in poetry, both in form and subject-matter, began much earlier, i.e., from the time of Thomson, Dyer and others, as we shall presently see. In this period of transition or passage from one style to another, from Classicism to Romanticism, the characteristics of the earlier age persisted side by side with those of the latter till the former passed away completely, giving place to the new movement in poetry with new subjects and new forms of expression, viz., the return to blank verse and the revival of the Spenserian stanza to afford ample scope for free movement of the poet's mind in place of the heroic couplet.

(c) Growth of pre-Romanticism in its different strands in the Age of Gray and Collins. "A Psychological interpretation of the Romantic Conflict" between the 'super-ego' (society) versus the 'id' (Individual).

Two dominant characteristics co-exist in the poetry of the age of transition, viz., (a) persistence of some of the conventions and traditions of classical poetry, e.g., the artificial poetic diction etc. and (b) the stirrings of a new spirit—a new mode of thought or subject-matter and form of expression.

In the forties of the century began the age of private meditation, not on contemporary men and events, but on universal themes of life and death. The single decade (1742-1751) saw the appearance of Pope's "Dunciad". Young's "Night Thoughts", Thomson's "Castles of Indolence", Gray's "Elegy" and the "Odes" of Collins. This shows that even when the fame of classical poetry, in its finest form of elegance and 'correctness', was at its height, the way was being prepared for its final overthrow. Even before Pope, who crystal-

lised the emotional and intellectual attitudes of his age in his poetry, had reached his eminence in the fourth decade of the century. Thomson's "Winter" (1726) and his "Seasons" (1730) had appeared on the scene, thus introducing something new, viz., the conception of the poet as a recluse living in the country, as a Druid playing on his 'airy harp' and meditating among country tombs as against the traditional idea of the poet as a patron of the London coffee-house. "During the twenty-five years from the publication of Thomson's 'Winter' to that of Gray's 'Elegy' (1751), most of the important works of poets possessed a new character sombre, stately and romantic in tone, all showing more or less a vague aspiration towards the study of Nature and not one composed in the heroic couplet." A large amount of the poetry of this period was written in blank verse. So the signs of the revolt were noticeable not only in subject-matter but in form also.

James Thomson (1700-1748) was thus the fore-runner and inspirer of Cowper, Wordsworth and Tennyson in his observation of country-life. He wrote in blank verse in an age of heroic couplet. He was very successful in making country themes alive in his *Seasons*, although he was yet hampered by the artificialities of the eighteenth century diction. Anyway, his description of external Nature was realistic, when contracted against the conventional pastoral of Pope. As Dowden says: "External Nature in the eighteenth century is not a living presence with which the spirit of Man communes; it is a collection of objects which may be described in detail and which are subject to certain general laws. To Thomson a flower is an object which has a certain shape and colour ;

'Fairhanded Spring scatters them abroad—
Violent darkly blue,
And polyanthus of unnumbered dyes :
The yellow wall-flower stained with iron brown.'

and as many others as the passage may require." His last work was the romantic poem, "The Castle of Indolence", in Spenserian stanza which definitely points to an age of very different preoccupations in poetry.

The publication of Thomson's *Seasons* (1730) divided the classical tradition in what thereafter the course of poetry ran along two parallel currents, viz., of the town and rustic poetry

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of almost equal strength. Ordinarily it is found that minor poets are unaware of the fact that the change of sensibility or feeling or emotion also demands a change of idiom and of verse form. Though a minor poet, Thomson was quite aware of this in what he borrowed from Milton and Spenser. He reproduced Spenser's archaic language and the famous stanza named after him with much charm in his "Castle of Indolence" in which he was able to create an atmosphere of dreamy melancholy. Thus Thomson helped in the reawakening of interest in the romantic poetry of the Elizabethan age. Edward Young's "Night Thoughts", a long poem in nine books, was very popular when it first appeared between (1742) and (1745), as it contained his reflections in blank verse on life, death and immortality. It was destined to earn more renown than Thomson's "Seasons". It was the first great appeal to 'melancholy' to an elegiac note, a feature of the poetry of the early Romantics, viz., Gray and Collins, as will be evident from a subsequent discussion. Young found pleasure in nocturnal churchyard meditations which reached its culmination in Gray's "Elegy." This kind of graveyard literature was also taken up by Robert Blair's "The Grave" and Thomas Warton in his "Pleasures of Melancholy". All these struck a new note of melancholy which was nourished upon a yearning regret for the past and advocated a return to the beliefs of other days; old legends and even old-fashioned superstitions in the very middle of the so-called age of reason. Though rather morbid and uneven, these works were significant for their deviations from set conventions and for bringing in a new matter of the poetry of the coming age, as a reaction against the light, gay and satirical poetry of the age. Blair's use of the blank verse was symptomatic of the protest against the tyranny of the heroic couplet. This melancholy school of English poetry derived its poetic inspiration from Milton's "Il Penseroso" which exerted a great influence on this particular strand of the romantic reaction.

Following the melancholy school Gray published his "Elegy" in 1750, which brought English poetry out of the stuffy and artificial atmosphere of the Court and the ball-room into the open air life of the country churchyard where the poet is represented as a recluse meditating, after dusk, on the basic problems of life and death and the vanity of human glory in a melancholy mood. "It is as an elegiac poet that

Gray became the precursor of Romanticism holding, for all ages to come, his unassailable and sovereign station as Collins did as a lyric poet." Indeed, the reflections on life, death and immortality—the horrors of the tomb and a delicate sensibility for a beauty in life, all these found expression in the poetry of Thomson, Blair, Dyer and Gray. This aspect of the earlier Romanticism can be set down in what may be called a subtle sense of mystery which may be found on analysis to be a complex emotion arising out of a sense of awe in the presence of the unknown and exuberant intellectual curiosity to probe into its secrecy.

Another strand of the earlier Romanticism found expression in what may be called 'Naturalism' and 'Return to Nature' arising out of a natural instinct for the elemental simplicities of life. 'Return to Nature' means dealing with subjects in connection with external Nature in a natural manner. This was a sort of reaction against the artificialities of life in towns connected with the nature of man which the great poets of the Augustan Age advocated. But the sense in which 'Nature' was used by the Augustans, entirely differed from that which Thomson at first vaguely used; Collins further clarified it and Wordsworth understood it in all its implications. By the term 'Nature,' Augustans meant 'the nature of Man' as the proper subject-matter of poetry and not the wild, crude Nature of the hills, mountains etc., in the country. This latter was the new subject-matter, viz., external Nature without reference of Man which these early Romantics, viz., Thomson, Dyer, Gray and Collins introduced into English poetry and brought their poetic utterances closer to common emotions which form the stuff of human life in themes of perennial interest to the common man. Like Thomson, Gray was out of sympathy with the main stream of poetical activity in the eighteenth century even though he could not free himself completely from the traditional poetic style of the Augustan Age. Thus the reaction represented by these early pioneers was based on a discontent with the limitations of town poetry—a leaning to the mediaeval and the mysterious and a desire for greater simplicity and closeness to Nature. To realise the full implications of the change in taste brought about by these pioneers of the early phase of Romanticism, we must understand that the society in which Johnson was the arbiter of literary taste, had its centre and all its interests in

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town and the social climate was the stuffy and artificial atmosphere of the Court and the ball-room of fashionable circles. Under such conditions the country was neither loved nor really known. So it was easily idealized into a conventional background for pastorals and totally ceased to be a living source of inspiration at all for poetry. Johnson openly declared that the chief office of poetry is the embellishment of moral truth of didacticism. He also stressed the ideal of 'correctness' in thought and expression within the obvious limitation of the only subject-matter of poetry, viz., Man. It is to the infinite credit of Thomson to break away from this tradition. Thus the first discordant note—the first rift in the classical lute—was struck as early as 1726 with Thomson's "Seasons", followed by Young, Shenstone and a few other minor writers, then by Collins and his "Odes" in 1746 and, last of all, by Gray whose most important work on a new subject matter in poetry, though still maintaining some of the conventions of the old tradition in his "Elegy" in 1751.

Yet another stream of the earlier Romantic reaction was what may be called 'lyricism'—the revival of which can also be traced in Thomson in his poetry of personal emotion, of sincere self-expression with the charm of the melody of its verbal expression. Thomson, one of the greatest among Romantic precursors, had, as early as 1726 in his Preface to "Winter" called for poetry's rescue from social satire by the choice of great and serious subjects such as arise in wild romantic country. His pretty lyric "On Solitude" is a precursor of Collin's famous lyric, "On Evening" in 1747. It is significant that Thomson's attempt was the first faint lyrical awakening expressing directly his own feelings from the death-like slumber into which English lyric had fallen after its swan song so far back as Dryden's "Song for St. Cecilia's Day" in 1687. Thomson and, after him, Collins thus helped to make possible the outburst of lyricism in Wordsworth in his publication of his "Lyrical Ballads", conjointly with Coleridge in 1798 to make a revolution in English poetry. Thomson's metrical experiments with Milton and Spenser undoubtedly paved the way for that overthrow of the heroic couplet of which both Gray and Collins took full advantage.

The revolt in the form, idiom and style of poetry was not, however, so complete as the subject-matter. Thomson was no doubt bold enough to compose in blank verse in place of the

heroic couplet—an example which was also followed by a few minor writers. But the artificial classical elements still persisted in the writings of most of the poets of the transition period including Gray and Collins. How do we account for the co-existence of the classical tradition in form and style with early Romanticism? Perhaps what really happened was that after Pope—that acknowledged master of classical poetry—there was no one who felt nearly enough to be able to use his form and style so successfully on the new subject-matter. They were perhaps unaware of the fact that change of sensibility for beauty in life and Nature also demanded a change in idiom and style. The originality of Gray in Collins consisted, therefore, in the adaptation of an Augustan style to an eighteenth century sensibility or feeling for naturalism and the common emotions which form the stuff of human life. To be original with minimum alteration is sometimes more distinguished than to be original with maximum alteration.

It will thus be seen that the early Romantics discussed above were each helping in his own way to introduce into English poetry new elements in subject-matter and style by the middle of the 18th century which ultimately in later years, undermined the stronghold of classicism, held by Johnson and his fast dwindling group of classicists, and formed “the psychological substance of the incipient Romanticism”.

(d) To Sum Up.

What is the genesis of Romanticism in the Augustan Age? It is psychological. It was a fact that the individual was completely ruled out of existence in the scheme of things as conceived by Augustan materialists like Hobbes and Locke. The result was that in such a conception of society the individual (the ‘id’) was lost in the society (the ‘super ego’). Literature was also completely integrated with social life. All Augustan classicists invariably wrote within the social context of the age; creative artists could not tolerate this situation with equanimity for long. So a reaction was inevitable for the liberation of the human spirit from this dominance of the super ego. This is what is meant by Romantic reaction led by these pre-Romantics headed by Thomson, Gray and Collins and all the rest of them, whose efforts to this end are summarised below.

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(1) The new spirit of revolt against classical domination was first discernible in the poetry of Thomson whose metrical experiments also gave a death-blow to the dominance of the heroic couplet. He introduced :

- (a) a note of naturalism ;
- (b) a love of external nature for its own sake ;
- (c) diffused an atmosphere of dreamy melancholy after the manner of Spenser ; and
- (d) lyricism and subjectivity in English poetry. The publication of his "Seasons" as early as 1726 divided the classical tradition. Thenceforward there were to be two parallel currents — of the town and rustic poetry.

(2) By the middle of the century the revolt against the classical school both in form and subject-matter had become more clearly marked in the works of other pre-Romantics in whom the poetry of rural meditation became the characteristic of the age in which Johnson remained an almost alien figure :

(a) Blair's blank verse poem, "The Grave", was a meditation on scenes of desolation and the horrors of the tomb.

(b) Young's "Night Thoughts" gave in blank verse of singular dignity his reflections on life, death and immortality.

(c) John Dyer's "Grongar Hill" (1726) also showed an equal though a less sublime love of the country with its usual accompaniments of the new poetry, reminiscent in manner of Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," viz., a love of solitude as a stimulus to contemplation. 'Gothic' ruin which inspires sombre thoughts on human greatness and so on, along with Thomson's another poem "The Castle of Indolence" (1748) which created an atmosphere of melancholy after the manner of Spenser.

(d) In 1747 William Collins (1721-1759) published his "Odes" which contained all the characteristics, of the new poetry of the 'pre-Romantic,' viz., subjectivity, note of melancholy, lyricism, love of Nature etc. It was the varied inspiration from all the above pre-Romantics, joined with a fine lyricism and a delicate feeling for Nature that produced the scanty work of William Collins whose "Ode on the Death of

Thomson" (1745) was also written in the tradition of the new churchyard school.

(e) In 1750, William Shenstone (1714-1763) another characteristic poet of the transitional period, broke a way in certain directions from 18th century poetic conventions and struck a really original line in his "Rural Elegance" which marks another step forward in the direction of the march of sensibility.

(f) In 1751 was published Gray's "Elegy" which definitely rejected the traditions of the classical school, both in metre and subject-matter, probably under the influence of Collins. In this way, we see in the forties of the Augustan age which was pre-eminently the age of town poetry, satire on public affairs being the most typical literature, begins the age of private meditation not on contemporary men and events but on universal themes of life and death, which ultimately brought about a revolution and ushered in an age of very different pre-occupations in poetry, viz., Romanticism.

Chronological Table

[Showing the rise, growth and advance of pre-Romanticism (Poetry of Sentiment) in the 18th century (Age of Gray and Collins)].

- 1700 Birth of James Thomson.
- 1714 Birth of William Shenstone.
- 1716 Birth of Thomas Gray.
- 1721 Birth of William Collins.
- 1726 Thomson's "Winter"; John Dyer's "Grongar Hill".
- 1730 Thomson's "Season".
- 1742 Young's "Night Thoughts" ; Blair's "Grave" ; Shenstone's "The School Mistress".
- 1747 Collin's "Ode to Evening".
- 1748 Thomson's "Castle of Indolence".
- 1750 Gray's "Elegy" ; Shenstone's "Rural Elegance" ; Macpherson's "Ossian".

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- 1756 Joseph Warton's "An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope."
1757 Gray's "Pindaric Odes".
1760 Macpherson's "Poems".
1761 Gray's "Norse Poems".
1762 Richard Hurd's "Letters on Chivalry and Romance".
1769 Gray's "Ode for Music".

2

THOMAS GRAY

Life, Personality, Works, Development of his Genius and of the Poetry of Sentiment – Literary Influences, with Chronology of Works.

Thomas Gray, the Man

(a) His Life.

Thomas Gray (1716-1771) occupies a distinctive place among the transitional poets of England during the eighteenth century. He was born on December 6, 1716, in Cornhill, London. His father, Philip Gray, had a peculiar temper. He was jealous of everybody. At times, he was surly and morose. At others, he was furious. He even attacked his wife, in the most inhuman manner, by beating, kicking, and punching. But she was a woman of great courage and devotion. She endured it all stoically for the sake of her son.

Such was the background of Gray's early life. He grew into a sensitive boy, frightened by his father, adored by his mother and petted by childless aunts. He had no company, no friend in his early years. He had to rely upon himself and his books. In 1725, Gray entered Eton. His years at Eton were unquestionably the happiest. He began to feel the first stirrings of his own creative powers. At Eton, he contracted two great friendships. The one was with Horace Walpole. He was a pale and fragile little boy, vivacious, self-possessed and somewhat conscious of his position, as the great son of a great Minister. It was his generosity that made it possible for Gray to undertake tours with him and enlarge his mental horizon. Walpole stood for influence and social position,

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wealth, elegance and fashion. Richard West was the second, a tall and slender, a thin-faced, pale-complexioned and a very shy boy. Temperamentally he was more akin to Gray, whose path Gray ultimately adopted and pursued to the end. Gray immortalised his early death in a beautiful sonnet.

After leaving Eton, Gray proceeded to Cambridge, which proved so unattractive to him that he called it 'the abode of desolation' and 'a silly dirty place'. One of the reasons of this antipathy towards the University could be that the subjects, he was obliged to study, were particularly distasteful to him. They were logic, philosophy and mathematics. Later, in the year 1742, he changed over to Law. The Law College, Inner Temple, treated him very well. He was no longer burdened with lectures and tutorials. Not very seriously concerned with his future, he settled for two years at Cambridge. During these two years, he devoted himself to the study of Italian and also to widening his knowledge of English and French poetry. His devotion was still to the ancient world and to the fresh fields of classical learning.

In November 1745, he was reconciled to his friend Horace Walpole, with whom he had a quarrel four years ago. About the same time, he became acquainted with Pope, the most famous poet of his age. Two years later, he became friendly with William Mason, who later on became his biographer.

In December 1757, on the death of Colley Cibber, he was offered the Poet Laureateship, which he declined. He did so because he was neither attracted by the emoluments nor by the reputation of office, which had been lowered by a succession of inferior and even ludicrous appointments. Then, he, for one, would have found it difficult to write poems to order. He thought it derogatory.

In 1762, he started on an inland tour visiting Richmond, Ripon, Sheffield and Chatsworth in Yorkshire and Derbyshire. Two years later, he started on a tour in Scotland.

In July 1768, Gray was offered the Professorship of Modern History at Cambridge. He accepted it. This professorship was merely an honorary appointment, as no lectures had to be delivered.

In the summer of 1770, he made his last tour through Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire. In 1771,

he planned to visit Switzerland, which he could not do owing to ill-health. This ill-health ultimately brought about his death in July, 1771.

(b) His Personality.

Gray was rather short in stature. In his early life, he had a graceful build, but in his later years, he became too plump.

He was a reserved man, very sensitive and shy. From his early life, he loved seclusion. He remained sad and melancholy. R. W. Ketton Cremer writes, "Melancholy, Spleen, Hypochondria—these are many names for the condition of which Gray was a self-confessed victim. Even in his Cambridge days, it had come and gone, darkened his life for weeks and then suddenly dispersed....." Gray's melancholy was first and foremost a trouble of the spirit. He had been delicate in childhood. He was slow-moving and unathletic by nature. He was never free from apprehension about his health. He often suffered from blood pressure. He even had attack of gout. It was perhaps his physical weakness that he developed a pessimistic attitude towards life. His poems abound in frequent allusions to his personal life. In the penultimate stanza to the "Eton Ode," he suggests how his mind had dwelt upon the varied possibilities of illness, even at this early age.

A number of factors—the sadness of his mother's death ; his sudden onsets of melancholy ; growing anxiety about his health increased Gray's tendency to withdraw into seclusion and an apathetic attitude towards life.

(c) His Works.

He wrote a number of Latin poems. The first poem that he wrote was in the year 1730, when he was at school. It was published, for the first time, by Sir Edmund Gosse. Then, at the University again, he wrote a few more Latin verses. In fact, from 1730 to 1741, he devoted himself to Latin verse only. Though these poems are not representative of his genius, they do have ample evidence of that ripeness of scholarship and that moralising vein that distinguish his finest poems—the "Odes" and the "Elegy".

In 1741, he made his first attempt at English poetry. He started writing *Agrippina*—a tragedy in blank verse. After

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writing the first scene—the opening speech by the heroine of the play—he sent it to his friend, West, for opinion. West spoke unfavourably of the style. So Gray abandoned the attempt and never tried it again.

The year following this abortive attempt, 1742, is an eventful year for Gray's career as a poet. It was this year when his best poems were written or commenced. In the summer of 1742, he wrote the "Ode on the Spring", "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College", "Sonnet on the Death of West" and "Hymn to Adversity". In the autumn he commenced the "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard". None of these was published for several years. These poems are clearly linked in thought and mood. The same themes run through all three of them—"the flight of youth, the certainty of suffering and death and the inevitability of human fate."

The first of Gray's poems that appeared in print, in 1747, was his "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" but it was published without the writer's name. In 1748, three of his poems, the Odes on "Spring", on "Eton College" and on the "Death of a Favourite Cat," were published by Dodsey. These again did not bear the writer's name.

In the year 1750, Gray wrote the humorous verses entitled a "Long Story", a mock-heroic account of his introduction to Lady Cobham and Miss Speed at the Manor House. Lady Cobham was a widow.

In 1754, he wrote a fragment, "Ode on the Pleasure Arising from Vicissitude", which he left unfinished. This fragment, if completed, it is said, would have ranked with the greatest of his poems. The same year he completed the Ode on "Progress of Poesy". The "Bard" was commenced early in 1755 and completed in 1757. The first is strongly suggestive of Dryden's "Alexander Feast". It also shows Milton's influence in a greater melody and variety of expression. It has unique poetical qualities which are expressed by Edmund Gosse in the following words, "In these passages especially he employs the double rhyme. We seem to catch in Gray the true modern accent, the precursor of the tone of Shelley and Byron, both of whom, but especially the former, were greatly influenced by this free and ringing music." The second is in

'Grongar Hill,' followed his predecessors. But Gray, from the very first, showed a disposition to return to more national forms and to work out his stanzas on a more harmonic principle. He seems to have disliked the facility of the couplet, and the vague length to which it might be repeated. His view of a poem was that it should have a vertebrate form, which should respond, if not absolutely to its subject, at least to its mood. In short, he was a genuine lyricist."

A sonnet marked "At Stoke ; August 1742" celebrating the death of his dear friend, West, is remarkable for its quatrain of alternative heroics which is the basis of all his harmonic effect. In it, he poured fourth his grief and affection in some impassioned hexameters, full of earnest feelings. In no other of his writings does Gray employ quite the same personal and emotional accents, in none does he speak out so plainly from the heart.

The same year saw the production of the "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College." "This ode was inspired by the regret that the illusions of boyhood, that innocence that comes not of virtue but of inexperience, the sweetness born not of a good heart but of good digestion, the elation which childish spirits give and which owes nothing to anger or dissipation, that these simple qualities cannot be preserved through life."—(Edmund Gosse). Its famous felicities—"to snatch fearful joy," "regardless of their doom, the little victims play," "where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise"—have finally become commonplace witticisms to the millions.

"Hymn to Adversity" written about the same time is the first utterance in which he shows that stateliness of movement and pomp of allegorical illustration which give an individuality to his nature style, no English poet, except perhaps Milton and Shelley, has maintained the same severe elevation throughout a long lyrical piece.

One more work of importance was begun at Stoke in the autumn of 1742 and it was the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." It is called the poem of poems. "It is the supreme expression of his poetic genius. The feelings it expresses are so universal and the phrasing so perfect that it is difficult not to regard it as a thing which has always existed.

The "Elegy" is the most popular work of Gray. It possesses

the charm of incomparable felicity, of a melody that is not too subtle to charm every ear, of a moral persuasiveness that appeals to every generation, and of metrical skill that in each line proclaims the master. The "Elegy" may also be looked upon as the typical piece of English verse, our poem of poems; not that it is the most brilliant or original or profound lyric in our language, but because it combines in more balanced perfection than any other all the qualities that go to the production of a fine poetical effect."—(Edmund Gosse). This poem, a sublime effusion, is the superb specimen of that piece of art, which opens the door of compassion and sympathy for the down-trodden and oppressed humanity. And, so intense and tender is the appeal of the utterance that it immediately strikes at the very root of our finer and keener sensibilities and sets all vices on fire creating a spacious corner for that section of humanity, which owing to the sheer disfavour of luck, is destined to suffer from poverty and misery. A theme, so common as that of "Elegy" has been so skilfully handled by the poet that it has become the very organism of versification—Poetry incarnate. It has an appeal which can never be stale and out of date, and which shall survive till the Doomsday, like an evergreen shrub.

Swinburne, who has been deeply and extravagantly unjust to Gray, has been obliged to praise this poem. He says that "as an elegiac poet, Gray holds for all ages to come, his unassailable and sovereign station. Indeed, a tender heart beats under the stiff brocade of Gray's style in the Elegy and a stately argument moves steadily on from the lovely hushed opening to the wistful close. Gray's "Odes," "The Progress of Poetry" and the "Bard," written along the lines of the triumphant Odes of Pindar, exhibit his most original poetic qualities. They mark the second stage in Gray's poetic development.

"The Progress of Poetry" is one of the most intelligibly and rationally built of all the odes in the language. It is a poem in three stanzas, in an elaborately consistent verse form, with forty-one lines in each stanza. The length of these periods is relieved by the regular division of each stanza into strophe, antistrophe and epode. This plan was not used by any other English poet except Congreve who had written in 1705 a learned and graceful discourse on the "Pindaric

Ode' which Gray was familiar with. The power of evolution of this poem has been uncommon among the lyrical poets even of a high rank. Even in Milton, it is strangely absent. In Collins also, this failing is apparent. His poems are a burst of emotion but not an organism. Shelley again, in his longer Odes, seems to lose himself in beautiful meandering oratory, and to stop, as he began, in response to a mere change of purpose." Keats, on the other hand, is consistent in his evolution. And so is Wordsworth. Edgar Allan Poe, not a first rate poet in intellectual value, also has this gift.

Gray's "The Bard" has enjoyed an instant and sustained popularity. It is almost without rivals among poems cherished by poetical persons for the qualities of sublimity and pomp of vision. The opening is admirably startling and effective. The voice that meets us with its denunciations is that of the last survivor of the ancient race of Celtic Bards, a venerable shape who is seated on a rock above the defile through which the forces of Edward I are about to march. This mysterious being in Gray's own words, with a voice more than human, reproaches the King with all the misery and desolation which he had brought on his country, foretells the misfortunes of the Norman race and, with prophetic spirit, declares that all his cruelty shall never extinguish the noble ardour of poetic genius. The whole scheme of the poem is strictly historical and its treatment is powerful and dramatic.

Another Pindaric Ode on "The Liberty of Genius" was planned about the same time. Of this unfortunately, there exists only the following fragment of an argument :

"All that men of power can do for men of genius is to leave them at their liberty, compared to birds that, when confined to a cage, do but regret the loss of their freedom in melancholy strains, and lose the luscious wildness and happy luxuriance of their notes, which used to make the woods resound."

The subject is most suitable for the poet's power. It is a matter of regret that Gray probably never tried to complete it.

In the third stage, Gray turns momentarily from his usual material and exhibits a new field of romantic interest in two Norse poems—"The Fatal Sisters" and "The Descent of Odin". In these poems he reveals himself as an ardent lover of Nature. These poems mark the end of Gray's poetical career. During a period of thirty years, he could not produce much, but whatever little, he could, is of such a fine quality that he has been given a high place among the poets of his country. The only other poet, who could claim a place of distinction, among English poets with a slender output of poems, is Coleridge.

(e) Growth of Incipient Naturalism and Romanticism in Gray.

From the point of view of the dawn of Naturalism and the gradual growth of Romanticism, the following facts emerge—(1) Beginning as a classicist and a thorough-going disciple of Dryden and Pope, Gray finally emerges as a Romantic. His early poems of the first period, *i.e.*, those written in 1742, are genuine products of the Augustan Age. (2) The "Elegy" strikes the first melancholy note that was to follow him throughout his life. It represents Gray's transitional frame of mind, although it is full of traces of classicism, *viz.*, personification, didacticism etc. It is pointed out by a critic that Gray removed Latin names from one of the most famous stanzas of the "Elegy" and substituted for them names of 'Hampden', 'Milton' and 'Cromwell' from comparatively recent English History. Though perhaps a small thing in itself, this is really a long step forward for it is an index to a profound change in Gray's mind. The spirit of incipient romanticism is also traceable in Gray's love and sympathy for the rude forefathers of the hamlet in "Elegy" besides a love for Nature and landscape. The poem is Romantic in mood though set in Classical framework. (3) Gray's third period in his poetic career may be taken to contain the two 'Pindaric Odes', printed in 1759, which place him well on his way towards Romanticism. In "The Bard" he unrolls the panorama of the English Kings followed by the procession of glittering images in "The Progress of Poesy". Mason's description of the work as 'a Pindar's rapture' in the lyre of Gray on his epitaph is significant of what poet himself had considered to be the centre of his lyrical work. (4) In 1755,

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Gray became interested in Northern mythology—an interest which he himself evinced in his letters to his friend, Horace Walpole. It is only in his letters that Gray discloses himself in his entirety. “Here one enjoys the charm of a real spontaneousness, that is witty without effort: of an affectionate nature, made for friendship, and feeling for landscape—an inquisitive taste for the archaic and Gothic.....One is astonished to read, at a date so early as 1739 about the sublimity of the Alps, and the religious horror of high mountains—effusions—which outdistance the stage marked by Thomson in the progress towards the love of wild Nature. All the poems of this period—written between 1760 and 1764 are distinctly Romantic. On them rests one of his chief claims to be a pioneer of the Romantic revival. He was admittedly the first English poet to find inspiration in the heroic sagas of the North and the Welsh. It was his own mediaeval sympathy, contrary to the spirit of his age which made him turn quite consciously to these sources of English poetry, and which had such a direct influence on the poetry of Scott in a later age.

The above illustrates how the invasion of an altogether new spirit—of Naturalism or Sentiment—brought about the pre-romantic awakening in Gray, and how though he belonged to his Age by a very conscious allegiance to the poetic creed of Classicism in his earlier poetry, he turned more and more in his later works towards the Age that was followed by his instinctive and the somewhat unconscious preference, *i. e.*, the Age of Romanticism.

(f) Gray in Relation to His Age and His Attitude towards it.

“Gray lived in a time of transition from classicism to Romanticism. At that time the influence of the school of Pope and the tradition of the so-called pseudo-classical school of poetry presided over by Johnson reigned supreme though fitful efforts at experiments after a new style of poetry—a new colouring—were being made by the younger generation of lesser minor poets like Thomson, Dyer, Blair, Shenstone and others. The strongest among these younger poets now began to cease to follow Pope, partly because they despaired of surpassing him in his particular excellences—partly, no doubt, in

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu response to an alteration in popular taste. The Augustan spirit had little part in suggesting what was best in the poetry of the second section of the eighteenth century."—(Gosse). The new spirit of poetry may be described as the dawn of naturalism or the rebirth of the poetry of Sentiment or the pre-Romantic awakening. These minor poets changed the character of the thought element in their poetry as well as the form in some cases but in the main the style and diction did not so much alter. This explains the phenomenon of a kind of strange duality in their poetry, viz., the classical tradition existing side by side with Romantic subjects associated with the return to Nature and a movement towards a radical simplification of life and a tendency to discard the cramping artificial conventions calculated to prevent the free development and expression of individuality.

Gray did not possess the necessary creative force to bring about a fusion of "the contrary impulses of Romantic naturalism and spontaneity and classical insistence on form, measure, balance and lucidity." "In fact Gray's art does not dominate the conflict of tendencies: he makes a choice and takes a side; he clearly settles down with the friends of discipline and order. Gray was thus a Classicist by choice and a Romanticist by instinctive and unconscious preferences. He was too deeply a man of his Age to lead the revolt and reaction against the classical school, in spite of the wide interest he developed in his later works in Romantic themes, his sensibilities, his soaring imagination freed from the cramping restrictions of Classicism and his instinctive love of Nature and man in his elemental stage. "Broadly, what he did was to take all that appealed to him in the manner of Milton and all that appealed to him in the manner of Dryden and of Dryden's followers—Pope and Johnson—and to blend it into something of his own; to translate, so to speak, into this idiom, or rather into successive forms of it whatever he wished to say. We must not, then, think of him too much as a rebel against the verse of his period or forerunner of later poetry. He did not so regard himself, and would hardly have been so much honoured in his lifetime had he been so regarded. He was felt not to have broken with existing traditions but to have worked within them in an original way."

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The main stream of poetical activity in the first half of the century was led by the school of Pope, and Gray was out of sympathy with it by instinctive preference. This was perhaps the primary cause of the comparative paucity of his poetic output besides secondary causes, such as, his habits of self-criticism, his meticulous effort at perfection of form and content and the narrow range of subject-matter open to him in the age, which explains why he did not write anything significant before 1740. He was too genuinely fond of Nature to embark upon an experiment on the artificial type of pastoral current in the Age in which Nature had long ceased to be a living source of inspiration since the time of Dryden. He felt himself unsuited to the categories of poetry current in his Age and developed in the cramped atmosphere of the town society, for his chief interest lay in the directions in which the society in which Johnson was the arbiter of taste, did not care to go to seek inspiration. His letters to his friends give us a bit of his mind—his predilections for the new Romantic poetry then being experimented upon by pioneers like Thomson, Dyer, Blair, Shenstone and others before him: "They give to the feeling for landscape a franker and more complete expression than that which is found in the poems; and one is astonished to read at a date so early as 1739, about the sublimity of the Alps and religious horror of high mountains. The diary of the journey to the English Lake district of thirty years later, is full of an intelligent and precise passion for the nobility and austerity of the horizons that Wordsworth was later to love."

(g) Literary Influences on Gray.

Tripartite Influence

(DRYDEN'S, POPE'S AND JOHNSON'S)

"Between 1675 and 1680 a marked Renaissance of the national spirit reveals itself in English literature. The inevitable reaction of the deeper instincts against the excess of worldly corruption and the very few signs of a moral awakening; the political opposition to Government of Charles II, the Protestant unrest, the agitation which precedes and accompanies the 'Popish Plot', the shame of the subjection, suspected, if not fully known, of the English monarchy to France, and the fear inspired by the ambition of Louis XIV;

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lastly the fatigue which was at length provoked by the dominating influence of French art and fashions ; all contribute to this secret movement towards the re-possession and re-assertion of the national self which will not henceforth be checked, and of which the Revolution of 1688 will be the decisive success. This reaction is clearly visible in the drama, and more especially can be seen in the works of Dryden.”—(Cazamian). Between 1675 and 1685, one witnesses a momentary revival of the English drama of the national type, or rather, of a mixed type in which the national element becomes again more consciously essential.

The Revolution of 1688 marks a break with tradition. It also marks moral changes. In every respect, English literature between 1688 and 1702 forms a period of transition, both in inspiration and style. It bears the stamp of a special character. “Each literary kind reveals the influence of a spirit akin to that of the Restoration itself, but still different from it.”

Dryden's contemporaries, whose personalities are less robust, appear to be linked up by national tradition and, therefore, akin to the spirit of the Restoration period. They are dominated by the influence of their day ; that of an age of dryness, when natural outpouring of a singing soul tends to become a paradoxical exception and that of an aristocratic and artificial society, “which only favours such themes ‘as harmonise with the fashionable scepticism of a life of pleasure’. The literature of this period is traceable to impulses that are wholly intellectual.” Three main themes are dominant—gallantry ; the sustained dignity of an abstract argumentation ; and the vehemence of a philosophic ardour. All poems, whether they seek animation and wit, reasonable cogency or the sublime, are all chilled by the same cold atmosphere. Passion is scarce in them and feeling exceptional ; scarce also is the heat of a strong imagination that can grasp the realities of the soul of the world and communicate their moving appeal. “Imagination and the creative energy of the writer have no place in literature of this period. The pursuit and the realisation of beauty are wholly governed by the rules of wisdom, prudence and judgment.” Here the needs of the heart are paid but little attention and delicacy is too often put to shame, because lightness of emotion serves to cover a heavy sensuality. There is a will to be different.

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There is a demand of wit, a ready and correct reply. There is a demand for a careful expression, a clearness of thought. There is a demand for regularity of the metrical expression of the line. All this was for elegance and good taste.

A note of difference is distinctly visible in the dramas of Lee who is a belated Elizabethan. Lee is indeed a romanticist. "In him reawakens the temperament of some among the decadent dramatists of the Renaissance, with their tendency to frenzy and morbidity. This reviving is natural; but one also feels it to be, in some measure, artificial or at least voluntary, stimulated by a fashion of the day, by the success of heroic tragedy. This is the kind in which Lee makes his first attempt; then, at the same time as Dryden, he modifies his manner, and adopts blank verse. We really have here the rejection of a discipline, and the return to more instinctive habits. 'The Rival Queens', 'Mithridates', 'Lucius Junius Brutus' may have found their subjects in ancient history and make a native display of erudition; one cannot conceive of plays less classical. The construction is weak, the psychology almost rudimentary; and the style, setting aside the work of twenty years is full of a bombast, a conceit, a bad taste, which takes us back to the very eve of the Restoration.

"This impulsive liberty spends itself in fiery flights of imagination. The images of Lee are of an extravagant audacity, and animated by an extraordinarily sensual ardour. At intervals this frenzy becomes more sober, or better inspired, and then we are surprised by effects of energy, of suggestive power, of poetry, which recall the Elizabethans in a striking way. Or at times the East is evoked with a warmth and a grace that are young and full of fancy, recalling the touch of Marlowe. But these flashes of initiative, spontaneous art are rare, the texture of the plays is of an almost purely verbal intensity, the exaggeration and monotony of which are extremely fatiguing."—(Cazamian). The Restoration literature has its brilliance, a kind of radiating glow, in which there still plays a last glimmer of the Renaissance. But if one considers the future, it is in the domain of prose that this period has realised its most lasting creation.

POPE'S INFLUENCE

Pope forms the axis of the period between the death of

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 Dryden (1700) and the publication of "Lyrical Ballads" (1798). From 1702 to 1740, Restoration continues to have its sway. We term this period as 'classical'. Its central figure is Pope. He is also the symbol of it. Yet, in certain respects Pope is unimportant. He lacks inspiration. He lacks warm emotion. He lacks sensuous beauty. He is poor in the largeness of imagination. He has small knowledge of books, though he was a curious reader. He is largely read for style, not for facts of history, of science, of Nature, of anything except the town, he knows nothing. His defect is moral rather than artistic. There are no depths in him nor are there any heights. His wisdom is limited. It is worldly. His satire is too occasional. It is personal and prejudiced. He lacks a deep insight into life. He also lacks sympathy for his fellow men.

In regard to his merits, it can be said that Pope has a unified and harmonious view of life. And, this view his poetry presents. "His focal centre is man, not man dramatically interlocked with a great mesh of natural and cosmic energies, as in Shakespeare; nor man and his universe formed by the 'mighty opposites' of conscience and culture, as in Milton; nor man viewed variously according to the subject—political, religious or literary, as in Dryden, but man, who in himself, must achieve the synthesis or harmonization which religious and political schemes are always claiming to achieve for him." Pope, indeed, covers exactly as much ground as is proper for Man's taste. He is therefore, regarded as a great moral poet of England. His poetry is a Book of Life.

With these points of merits and demerits, Pope influenced his successors. This influence comprises peace, harmony, balance and poise. In his poems he has created a poise by balancing Man against Nature—Love against Death. He assumes that aristocratic peaceful society and wars, politics and social injustice are not relevant in them.

JOHNSON'S INFLUENCE

His Age.

There was no cleavage in the history of ideas or in that of form. Classicism continued to rule even after the Age of Pope. There was no revolution in art. Principles remained as they were. Pope and his age were the origin and the giver of his

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu generation. After him no one came forth to succeed in the heritage which Dryden had handed down to him.

New inspiration had, however, started welling forth. But the form continued the same as before. It was modelled upon tradition. The new period, therefore, was of a mixed character. But this mixed character was not distinctly visible because Johnson, a pre-eminently classicist, upheld the cult of these values which Reason had established. Behind the outward permanence of his reign, the hidden work of transformation went on in silence. And the emotional tendencies, which were perceptible as early as 1700, grew prominent. Sentiment associated itself with imagination. In society, the middle class came into prominence in politics, in life and in manners. The aristocracy though not completely negatived or destroyed, was made more supple and instead the middle class made itself strong.

The middle class of 1740 did not bring with it any desire for reform in the province of art but it did have tendencies for a reform, though society became largely a middle-class one and there was a change in the soul of the nation. There was still a love for the national literature with a conspicuous stamp of its aristocratic origin.

Johnson was the head and symbol of this period. "He presented a temporary fusion which seemed decisive and final, of morality with the taste for solid and regular artistic scales." Obedience to rules was considered as great as religious conscience. Johnson's age, therefore, was a continuation of the Popean age and also a beginning of the age, age of new inspiration and sentiment.

His influence.

Johnson's influence had been social and moral first as much as literary. His letter to Lord Chesterfield was a proclamation of the close of the age of patrons. His literary works maintained a stability and an order through a period that was secretly changing. He upheld the glories of past. But his contemporaries, though smaller than him, give proof of their personal talent and of belonging to another temperament. In them appeared a change—an inner change. They revealed a depth of transition. The transition came not in form but in content. Lord Lyttelton, an imitator of Pope in his early

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works, struck a different note in his matured works. John Armstrong showed an inverse development, Matthew Green, Nathaniel Cotton, Richard Glover and James Grainger were rather simpler poets. They revealed an impoverishment of inspiration. All these poets, though of second or third-rate merit, wrote from impulses, which were rather rationed. There was in them, an admixture, variously proportioned, of reason and of a new spirit. These two things were not parted by any clear line. The two domains overlapped.

Sentiment brought in a love of Nature. It brought a deep feeling for Nature. This feeling sprang from the concrete descriptions about the beauties of Nature. Thomson was the first to describe them. His inspiration—his sensuous perception was an originality. Thomson's was a dual personality. As an amiable Epicurean, carefree, the friend of easy leisure, he was with Pope. And as a moralising and religiously inclined being and also fond of sentiment, he was with Richardson. And, it is the latter Thomson, who was better in agreement with the social, psychological and literary movement. Then his "Notes of vernal sweetness and of pensive autumnal beauty", "his intensity of feeling and fullness of emotion" proclaimed the fact that he was much in advance of his Age. For them, he was on line with the Romantics. Thomson and other poets of Nature, David Mallet, William Somerville and Young showed themselves keenly desirous of tender emotions. There was also a fond search for a mournful kind of pathos in them. They appeared to draw inspiration from Life, Death and Melancholy. Then to the love of Nature and Melancholy was added that of the Past, the attraction of ruins, the sense of wonder.

Gray is closely allied to these poets. He is also a transitional poet, but in the same way. He, however, has the impact of the age.

(b) Literary Influences— a Summing Up.

(1) In his early poems Gray was a Classicist and a disciple of Dryden. They belong to the Augustan school and are written in the heroic couplet, e. g., his "Address to Ignorance" and his poem on "The Alliance of Education and Government".

(2) After this he wrote several lyrics— all "Ode to the

Spring", "Eton College", a "Hymn to Adversity" and a "Hymn to Ignorance"—All these are conventional in thought and diction and follow the pattern of Dryden's lyrics.

(3) The poetic language perfected by Pope was at the root of Gray's own. Broadly speaking, what he did in his earlier poems, was to take all that appealed to him in the manner of Milton and all that appealed to him in the manner of Dryden and of Dryden's followers and to blend it into something of his own.

(4) Gray was admittedly a greater Classicist than the so-called classical writers of his Age, viz., Pope and Johnson. "As he passes from the smaller to the larger ode and makes his notes on Plato and Aristophanes, we see that his motto is that of Collins—'revive the just designs of Greece'. Gray reflects in a powerful way the still nascent appreciation of the Greek genius and the escape from the bondage to Latin." He tried to approximate the strictly Greek model of the Pindaric Ode with a view to catching some of its stateliness, music, rolling rhythm, and grandeur of execution. Yet the fact remains that it was this conventionalism of style—this seeking after perfection according to the classical pattern—that actually thwarted his ideas and prevented his early poetry from breaking out into spurts of Naturalism and return to Nature. The leading features of the diction of the pseudo Classicists—Dryden, Pope and Johnson—which were also common to Gray's poetry have been already discussed above. (Diction under "Gray's contribution to classicism")

(5) The new spirit of revolt against classical poetry both in form and subject-matter, which arose even before Pope's death, profoundly influenced Gray. The influence of Thomson, for instance, on Gray's attitude towards Nature was undeniable, though Gray was never willing to admit this. "Thomson's metrical experiments undoubtedly paved the way for the overthrow of the couplet of which Gray took full advantage." Again the critical and poetic work of the Wartons and the lyrics of Collins must have influenced Gray's definite rejection of the traditions of the classical school both in metre and subject, even though Gray spoke slightly of both in 1746. That Collins exercised a profound influence on Gray is clear from the same atmosphere of contemplative

melancholy noticeable in their typical poems, viz., Collins' "Ode to Evening" and Gray's "Elegy". The similarity of spirit of their Pindaric Odes is a pointer to the fact that Gray was most probably affected by Collins under the influence of his studies of Northern mythology and Evan's "Specimen of the Poetry of the Ancient Welsh Bards". Gray wrote in 1764 "The Triumphs of Owen".

(6) Edward Young's "Night Thoughts", was the first great appeal to Melancholy. His nocturnal churchyard meditation undoubtedly influenced Gray's "Elegy". Likewise, Edward Young's reflections on life, death and immortality also influenced Gray's pensive meditations in the "Elegy" although its moods are, obviously enough, founded on Milton's "Il Penseroso".

(i) Chronological Table of the Principal Events of Gray's Life.

- 1716 Thomas Gray was born in Cornhill, where his mother, Dorothy Gray, kept a shop in partnership with his sister, Mary Autrobus. His father, Philip Gray, was a scrivener. Thomas was the only survivor of a family of twelve.
- 1725 Entered Eton. He formed a quadruple alliance with Richard West, Horace Walpole and Thomas Ashton.
- 1735 Admitted to Inner Temple.
- 1738 Left Cambridge without taking a degree.
- 1739 Undertook a continental tour in the company of Horace Walpole.
- 1740 Visited Rome (March) and Naples (June).
- 1741 Visited Venice and European cities. His father, Philip Gray, died. Gray began his first English poem, the fragmentary "Agrippina".
- 1742 Wrote Ode on "The Spring", Ode on a "Distant Prospect of Eton College", "Sonnet on the Death of Richard West", "Hymn to Adversity" and the "Hymn to Ignorance".

1743 Took the degree of Law.

- 1747 Wrote the "Ode on the Death of a favourite Cat".
- 1750 Completed "The Elegy". Wrote the "Long Story".
- 1753 His mother died.
- 1754 Began writing "The Bard", which he completed in 1757. Completed the "Progress of Poesy" which he had begun in 1752.
- 1757 Offered the post of Poet Laureate, but refused.
- 1761 Returned to Cambridge. Wrote "The Fatal Sisters", "The Descent of Odin" and the "Welsh Odes".
- 1768 Appointed Professor of History and Modern Languages at Cambridge.
- 1769 Composed "Ode to Music".
- 1770 Excursions.
- 1771 Suddenly taken ill and died on July 30.

3

PSEUDO-CLASSICISM AND ROMANTICISM AND GRAY'S CONTRIBUTION

(a) Pseudo-Classicism and Romanticism.

Classicism of the Augustan age in English literature looked back to the French imitations of the Latin classics and not to the original Greek classics and as such, it may be called "Pseudo-classic". *What is 'Classicism'?*

Classicism—Herbert Grierson finds, as he found Romanticism, Classicism also difficult to define. "The charm of the classicism is the charm of the well-known tale, to which we listen over and over again, because it is told so well".—(Pater). The classic comes to us out of the cool and quiet of other times. In the classical literature of Greece and Rome, the essential quality is of order in beauty. For Pater, the term classical signifies measure, purity and temperament.

Grierson believes that the work of the classical artist is to give individual beauty of form to a body of common sentiments and thoughts, which he shares with his readers or hearers. He has also to give thoughts and views which have for his generation the validity of universal truths.

A classical age, therefore, is an age of reason—good sense. It is an age reflecting the spirit of a self-confident society seeking in art and literature the expression of its ideals and convictions and requiring of art the same attention to form, to correctness, which it seeks in manners and all the gestures of life.

The classical literature, again, according to Grierson,

cannot endure. It perishes in different ways. It dries up gradually. The forms, which have established themselves, are reproduced mechanically. Convictions become conventions. Even the old form of Greek poetry became conventional and academic. The classical balance may lose its parity. Its synthesis may disintegrate. The balance of intellect and feeling, of form and content, may give way to exaggeration of one or the other. It happened to French literature in the eighteenth century. Feeling was over-stressed by sentiment. Reason became dogmatic.

But this sort of disintegration may lead to disruption, because a fresh sap is beginning to rise in the veins of the human spirit. A new vision dawns on the imagination. A new artistic movement comes up. A rejection of old forms, a delight in the new experiments in vocabulary and metres comes to take place. A strange beauty of thought and vision, of phrase and rhythm comes to stay. Language grows richer, for words become symbols, not labels, full of colour and suggestions.

Pseudo-Classicism.—The literature of the age of Queen Anne and that of the first two Georges proves the correctness of the above remark. This age was the age of tranquillity and contentment. To the Englishmen of the eighteenth century, constitutional liberty and religious toleration were achievements. Proud of their achievements, they looked forward, with confidence, to increased prosperity and happiness. There was an assured society and a secure and leisured world. The classicism of the Age of Queen Anne, which many critics name as 'pseudo-classicism', was of a special type. *It was more Latin than Greek, more French than Latin.* French had its impact on the literary tastes of Europe. French critics gave the laws of literature to Europe. The Renaissance spirit had degenerated into excesses. The classical literature was emphatically a literature of a world, not the world that dealt with a fashionable society and high life. It dealt with the court, the town, the clubs, the saloons, coffee-houses and social parties. "The proper study of mankind is man," said Pope. But it was mankind in London. And, in London too, this literature is confined to 'My Lords and my Ladies'. It was pre-eminently an urban literature carrying very little for the

countryside. It was primarily a literature of civilisation, a peculiar civilisation as found in London.

The characteristic features of this literature were analysis, reasoning, realism, criticism, comedy and satire. The characteristic products of this literature were satire, burlesque and travesty. Wit was its special contribution. Since wit originates in intellect and prose expresses the wit most, prose had an upper hand in the eighteenth century. It was the century of prose. Great prose writers like Dryden, Addison, Steele, Swift, Dr. Johnson, Goldsmith, Gibbon and Burke were born in this century. Even the poetry of this age was conceived in a prosaic spirit. The appeal of this poetry was to the head and not to the heart. Reason reigned supreme. Emotion and enthusiasm were unimportant. The language was elegant. It was precise and exact. Form carried the day. Content was of little significance. There were established canons of composition. Dryden, Addison and Johnson consolidated the laws of literary taste. In drama, unities were to be maintained and tragedy was to be kept apart from comedy. Dryden considered Shakespeare a superior poet but an inferior artist. In poetry, the use of heroic couplet was considered as a perfect form. Blank verse was regarded as formless. It meant restraint and balance. Lyric poetry declined in the eighteenth century. It only revived in the hands of Gray, Collins and Burns. Song, a direct utterance of personal feeling, emanating from the heart, was absent in the literature of the century.

Romanticism.—Like Classicism, it has been difficult to give a specific and adequate definition of the term 'Romanticism.' Many attempts have been made to define this term, but the definitions so far available do not give a conclusive idea of the term. Of these, by far, the best known is that offered by Pater in his essay, 'Post-Script'. The Romantic spirit, Pater believes, is ever present. It is the result of curiosity seeking new things. "Addition of strangeness to beauty" constitutes the romantic character in art. Curiosity and love of beauty are the two elements of Romanticism. Every poet seeks beauty and attempts to convey his vision of beauty in his own way. Pope has done it. He added a strangeness to the beauty of the heroic couplet. He also added finish and polish to them and made them more perfect. But Pope could not be considered as

Romantic. Abercrombie also expresses a similar view. According to him Romanticism is an attitude of mind, an element of art. To Abercrombie, distance lends enchantment. 'Do not get too close to things'—says Abercrombie. "Romanticism is a withdrawal from outer experience to concentrate upon inner experience." Inner experience is a reality. Shelley has this experience. But this definition of Abercrombie, if examined critically, does not explain Romanticism. In the great works of Keats and Shelley—the two great Romanticists—there is as much of inner experience as that of outer experience. Keats's "Ode to Nightingale" and Shelley's "Ode to West Wind" have both these experiences. And, both these Odes are the finest pieces of Romantic poetry. Further, Abercrombie's definition leaves out that great source of Romantic inspiration—the great and glorious Past and the Middle Ages, which Scott and Hugo laid a great stress on. C.H. Herford tells us that imagination is more necessary for poetry than reason. He, in fact, stands for the liberty of imagination. Herford believes that great poets follow their inner vision and express their inner experience. "If it has more of personal idiosyncrasy, which is extravagant in the eyes of men, it is Romantic." The word 'extravagant' needs explanation. One thing may be extravagant at a particular time and may not be at another. The meaning of this word is relative. This again is the incompleteness of the definition. Instinct of 'wonder' is another definition of Romanticism by Theodore. This again is vague in the Romantic art. Spirit is more important. "The great Romantic lives by faith and not by reason."—Grierson. According to Dr. Hedge, "The essence of Romanticism is aspiration." T. S. Eliot says that the fragmentary, the immature and the chaotic represent Romanticism. All these definitions are incomplete and inadequate.

(b) Pseudo-Classicism and Romanticism—A Contrast.

"Classicism opposes the arbitrariness of fancy, pervading rationality to the mysterious and the unintelligible to the unpruned variety of Nature, the limitations of an eclectic art, to passion glorified and dwelt on, passion restrained and somewhat disparaged. Romanticism, on the other hand, makes prominent the qualities conspicuous in the youth of a nation, viz., bright aimless fancy, awe of the unknown, bright

eager uncritical delight in the abundance of Nature, impetuous joy and sorrow, breaking forth into such free and instant tears and smiles as the Argonauts uttered or the comrades of Odysseus. In Classicism, an age of understanding and refinement severely asserts its rights and excludes whatever cannot be brought to its test, all that is obscure, redundant or defective, too prominent or unobtrusive for its part, or which suggests undignified repellant associations. Unity of form is blended with eclecticism in subject; the taste of an exclusive age is seen in the choice of the latter, that of an intellectual age in the treatment of the former. Of these two elements the exclusiveness tends with a growth of more catholic culture to diminish while an enlarged understanding becomes capable of imposing a unity not less complete but only more complete upon more diverse matter. And, in this way, the antagonism of the two movements tends to dissolve, the more permanent elements of each persisting while the more transitory drop out. The wide outlook of Romanticism is accepted by a new generation, which at the same time rejects its wilful eccentricities."

(c) The Poetry of Sentiment.

We notice a sort of transformation in poetry due to the sentimental themes which formed the framework of the mid-eighteenth century poems. They had their place beside the classical motives and modified the spirit of the poetry without disturbing its form. Sentimental poets, therefore, cannot be separated from the classical poetry. Sentimental poets expressed themselves in classical forms, though they bear a clear difference in regard to themes, language and other literary kinds. The characteristic feature of the sentimental poetry is that it proceeds through successive advances. Emotion, a necessary source of all poetry, came to be regarded as the richest source of poetry, and therefore, the emotional theme of Nature came into prominence first of all. But, this aspect is yet far from Romanticism. The poets who made an attempt to depict the emotional theme of Nature could not go beyond the tender emotions. They tried to derive joy out of suffering. To them, Nature harmonized with their painful emotions and objects of Nature became a symbol or a suggestion of sadness and melancholy. They found inspiration in

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 death, in night, in suffering. Another characteristic of the poetry of sentiment is imagination.

With the presence of these characteristics, those of 'emotion' and 'imagination', we can easily foresee the dawn of Romanticism.

(d) Gray's Contribution to Pseudo Classicism and Romanticism.

Gray's Classicism.—Though Romantic tendencies are manifest in the later poetry of Gray particularly in the "Elegy", the "Progress of Poesy" and the "Bard" and for this reason he is regarded by some critics as the precursor of the Romantic Movement and, as a poet who was far in advance of his age; other critics, with equal emphasis consider him as a truly classical poet representing in himself all the important characteristics of the Augustan Age. From the two Odes, maturer poems as they are, it can be said that Gray was a true classicist. As he passes from the smaller to larger Odes and makes his notes on Plato and Aristophanes, we see that his motto is that of Collins, "revive then just designs of Greece." Bell has remarked, "By these writers a great deal of play is made with the fact that in his earlier poetry Gray turned from the pseudo-classic satire of urban and social life to find his inspiration in solitude and contemplation, and that for the subject-matter of his later poetry he went to the mythology of the Celtic and Scandinavian races and to the history of the despised and neglected 'Dark Ages'. That he did so does not lack significance. The 'Elegy' and other poems do indicate, of course, hardly a revolt from, but at least a weariness of the subject-matter in which our typical Augustans had delighted. An unprejudiced examination of them does, however, seem to the present writer to manifest how much more closely Gray is related to his pseudo-classical predecessors than to the Romantics of the succeeding generations." Bell declares Gray to have been a Classicist. His findings are based on three things—absence of intimate self-revelation of the soul confronted with Nature, a general treatment of Nature and adherence to classical diction. In his opinion, Gray lacks that self-revelation which characterises Romantic poetry. Even the "Elegy," the most famous of his poems, presents a point of view, which is not personal, but a generalised one

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and it pertains to the Classical tradition. Man, in this poem, is nothing more than the abstraction of Pope's quasi-philosophical poem, and, the pathos that rings through the "Elegy" is the pathos of the race as a whole and not of the individual. Similarly, about Gray's handling natural phenomenon. Bell is of the opinion that Gray has strictly adhered to pseudo-classical tradition as is evident from the generalising tendency present in his treatment of inanimate Nature. Bell is also of the opinion that Gray, in his choice and employment of language also, holds rather to the Classical than to the Romantic tradition. Gray valued the language "for its transparency." He did not value it for itself for its connotative power, its individual colour. The best language to him, was the one, which gave the thought with the least confusion and friction. "At his best his diction does fulfil the aim which he confessed to Mason of extreme conciseness of expression, yet pure, perspicuous and musical."

Lord David Cecil in his book, 'Poets and Story Tellers' looks upon Gray as a classical—"a typical eighteenth century artist with a peculiarly intense response to the imaginative appeal of the Past and whose pervading temper was a sober Melancholy". The pathos and melancholy of Gray is tinged with the moral attitude of his age and, therefore differs from the wholly pessimistic concepts of the Romantics. Like any sensible gentleman of the eighteenth century, Gray considered poetry as a useful and educative art whose primary aim was to give pleasure and assuage the frayed nerves of man.

His view of poetry, as expressed in the "Progress of Poesy" is also far from that of the Romantic poets, unlike Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn". Gray's poem does not give us a vision of art as an expression of ultimate spiritual reality, where "Truth is Beauty and Beauty Truth."

Gray was lacking in the fundamental characteristic of Romantic poets, that is, their love for the freedom of the individual and their hatred of tyranny as embodied in the French Revolution. He did not expose the cause of the downtrodden and the destitute. This has been very beautifully elucidated by Bell in the following lines :

"As we have suggested, however, the true Romantic

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Revival was not principally or essentially a revival of interest in things mediaeval at all. Its impulse and its character were given to it much more, and more directly by the individualistic ideal which lay behind the French Revolution, and by a consequent Renaissance of the sense of wonder over the life of here and now, or reverent sympathy with the passion and emotions of man as man irrespective of class and education. The apparently humble and commonplace took on an air of mystery to eyes aware of what nothing was to be counted common or unclean and needed no longer to be disguised in elaborate periphrasis or ignored as unworthy of poetic attention. In all this Gray by the very condition of his art could have no share nor could he impart to it any direction. His mind, for good or evil, was of an older day, and had he lived to such an old age as to see the Revolution and its literary first fruits, he would only have found in them a justification of his distrust of Voltaire and Rousseau."

There is no Romantic tinge even in Gray's love for the Middle Ages. Bell has criticised Gray's treatment of the Middle Ages in the following words: "Of the eighteenth century poets in this country, Chatterton alone was influenced by any intellectual or spiritual kinship with mediaevalism. Gray knew more of mediaeval history and literature than any Englishman of his time, but the modern historic sense was denied to him and his mediaeval, Scandinavian and Celtic poems are only academic exercises on themes hitherto strange to the academic tradition. Had he ever so faintly apprehended the soul of the Middle Ages, he could never have chosen to treat the subject of the "Bard" in the form of so-called Pindaric ode or have introduced Miltonic lines and phrases into versions from the Norse. To his efforts, in this direction the mediaevalism of our later Romantics owes practically, nothing, not merely in the sense that they borrowed nothing from him directly, but also in that their whole attitude to the past involved a repudiation of his principles and his practice. If they are indebted to any writers of Gray's period, those writers are Chatterton, Macpherson and Percy. Gray's work in the 'Gothic' land belongs really to a sort of false dawn of Mediaevalism Romanticism, whose terms are Pope's "Eliosa to Abelard" and the novels of Mrs. Radeliff and he had exhausted his influence sometime before Coleridge wrote a line

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 of "Christabel" long before Keats wrote his 'Eve of St. Agnes' or his "La Belle Dame Sans Merci".

Groffs in his book "Gray's Poetry and Prose" denies him even the slightest Romantic colouring. He considers him as the last champion of the Classical school. His words explain the final opinion about Gray's Classicism.

"Matthew Arnold extends his compassion to Gray as a poet born in an age of prose, but he deserves it rather as one dying on the eve of a poetic typhoon that obliterated all the standards and ideals by which he had worked. For among the rhapsodists, lispers, stock-headed dreamers and poets in quarto, who were preparing to sing the praises of the poetical reformation, Gray stands forth as the last champion of Apostolic Succession. Not a phrase of his poetry but has its sanction in some earlier usage, hardly a thought but wears the escutcheon of a noble house. The rhetorical forms and verbal ceremonies—the 'linen decency' of language—which to his successors seemed the symbol of 'a creed outworn'—were to Gray of the very substance of his faith, and wrapped in his gorgeous singing robes he moved through the ancient ritual, like the last faithful priest in a conquered city. Poetry for him was no sudden grace or fluttering gift of tongues. It was a spiritual and verbal inheritance, a treasury of merits continually reendowed by every high thought and noble expression. For a man to pretend that he could stand without it, that the wealth of his nature could dispense with the inheritance of art and that he could weave from his own poor substance a poetical tissue richer than that to which the immortals had contributed their gold would have seemed to Gray impudent and profane. Had he lived to see the rise of such a heresy, he would have given up writing poetry altogether."

To conclude, we can say that Gray was a classicist. He was obscure both in the subject-matter and the language. Then, in the matters of diction and language, he was bound to the neo-classical dogma. He was in the habit of using compound words and roundabout expressions, which made his poetry difficult to understand. Ridiculous circumlocution, roundabout expression, avoidance of the commonplace, marked his style as it marked that of others in his time. In his poetry, there is excessive use of uninspired personifications,

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personifications unpoetically conceived. The use of allegory makes it classical. "He makes a choice and takes a side, he clearly settles down with the friends of discipline and order."—Cazamian.

Romanticism.—Gray began as a Classicist and ended as a Romanticist. He began in the tradition of Dryden and Pope and ended in the manner of Wordsworth. His earlier poems, 'Ode on Spring', 'Ode on Distant Prospect of Eton College', 'Hymn to Adversity' contain nothing which may be called Romantic but his 'Elegy' does contain that frenzy and frantic passion, the ebb and flow of which stirred Shelley to discern the spirit of freedom and liberty in the tumultuous might of the wind collecting vapours on the bank of the Arno. Again, his earlier poems have all those qualities, which are associated with the poetry of Pope. They are genuine products of the Augustan Age. In them, the elements of Classicism are present in a marked degree. Even the love for Nature, found in his 'Ode on Spring', is artificial and does not exhibit that freshness of outlook which we notice in the Nature-poetry of the Romantics. Even the 'Elegy', which does possess, as said above, the spirit of freedom and liberty, has traces of Classicism and it is evident from the personification and the didacticism that Gray has so profusely made use of. But the 'Elegy', very conspicuously, marks certain characteristics of Romanticism. It has richness of imagery. It is full of the realistic quality of the pictures of the countryside. In fact, the description of Nature in the 'Bard' is casual, while in the 'Elegy' Nature is the subject of poetry. The return to Nature—epoch-making significance—is perceived in the 'Elegy', the following lines speak of this perception :

"Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds."

Then, there is deep sympathy for the poor people of the villages and this sympathy has a direct and forceful expression. This sort of directness was uncommon in the eighteenth century. Gray speaks :

"How jocund did they drive their team afield !
How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke !

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 Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
 Their homely joys, and destiny obscure ;
 Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
 The short and simple annals of the poor."

Then again, there is a deep note of melancholy—a sad mood born of reflection. This Melancholy was not a fashion of the age. It had a real social basis.

"And Melancholy marked him for her own."

He was a man especially given to fits of melancholy. There is, furthermore, a realisation that life is hard and this realisation that life is hard is an advancement in the direction of truth, realism and Romanticism. How deep is the love for life in these lines :

"For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
 Or busy housewife ply her evening care :
 No children run to lisp their sire's return,
 Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share."

There is personal element also. He talks of himself. How touching are the following lines :

"For thee, who mindful of th' unhonoured dead,
 Dost in these lines their artless tale relate ;
 If chance, by lonely Contemplation led,
 Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate."

Nevertheless, there is the stamp of his age. It is found in the choice of words and the love of personifications. But his style is also sonorous and musical. There are a few lines reflecting the mood of the poet. Sadness is eloquent in these lines :

"Beneath those rugged elms that yew-tree's shade,
 Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap."

It is for these qualities that Gray's poetry stands in a sharp contrast to the poetical effusions of his classical predecessors, whose poetry requires special exertion of mind rather than of heart to understand and interpret them.

Of his poems also, it can be said that they are distinctly Romantic in tone and rhythm. Gray is very much affected by the heralders of Romanticism, as is quite evident from one of his letters to Horace Walpole to whom he had written—"I am so charmed with two specimens of Erse poetry, that I cannot help giving you the trouble to enquire a little further

about them and should wish to see a few lines of the original that I may form some slight idea of the language, the measures and the rhythm."

In regard to the argument advanced by Bell that Gray's poems lack in self-revelation, it can be stated that the 'Elegy' does speak of the poet's own loss. His pecuniary hardships coupled with the physical handicaps had made the poet sad and gloomy and this sadness and gloom are present in the 'Elegy'. Indeed, there are few poems in English literature that express the sentiment of the author with such felicity and beauty. It is this self-revelation, it is this sentiment, which has made this poem immortal and earned for it the first place in Gray's literary productions.

His other poems show him well on the way towards Romanticism. "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard" announce him to be a Romantic. They are most imaginative poems of Gray and are distinctly in advance of the age. Sentiment and emotion, Imagination and sensibility, Wonder and curiosity, Force and fire, which characterise Romanticism, are present in these two Odes. While these Odes had appreciation in the hands of his friends, Dr. Johnson, the great classical author, criticised them. He observed, "The Odes are marked by glittering accumulations of ungraceful ornaments, they strike rather than please; the images are magnified by affectation; the language is laboured into harshness. The mind of the writer seems to work with unnatural violence." This criticism shows that the Odes had offended the lovers of Classicism.

Another great quality that marks the Romantic poetry is its love for remote distant things, wonder and strangeness. His poems, produced in 1761, namely the "Fatal Sisters" and "Descent of Odin," have these qualities. Lord David Cecil adds to say, "To Gray no place existed only in the present. Behind the England of his own day, he discerned as in a vision the long perspective of its past peopled with figures of bygone generations stretching, away to the dim horizons of antiquity..... Music too was powerful to evoke Gray's sense of the past. He was spellbound when the old Welsh harper, Parry, sang the wild traditional ballads of his native land. The unintelligible words and regular rhythms seemed to be

the very voice of the long-dead world of the Druids, echoing strangely down the ages."

The classicists had no love for wild nature. Addison's still remark, "My head is giddy and you cannot imagine how much I am pleased with the sight of a plain," is illustrative of the contempt for mountains, which were considered as wild, barbaric and useless. But Gray praises the wild beauty of mountains. In one of his letters, he writes, "..... you here meet with all the beauties so savage and horrid, a place can present you with ; Rocks of various and uncouth figures ; cascades pouring down an immense height of hanging groves of pine trees, and the solemn sound of the stream, that roars below, all concur to form one of the most poetical scenes imaginable." Mitford said, "No man was a greater admirer of Nature than Mr. Gray, nor admired with better taste."

This discussion amply proves that Gray is a poet much in advance of his Age. He "influenced the Age more than the Age influenced him ; he led rather than followed." Brooke has nicely touched the emergence of the Romantic element in Gray's poetry, "Gray was not only a naturalist in the study of man and the natural world, he was partly a Romantic and pushed into a higher life the romantic elements in the transition. The first element of this Romanticism, first in point of time, its sentimental, personal melancholy—was his ; and the thought-weighted, scholarly, careful representation of this element, gave it, not only a stronger foundation in the spirit of the time that it had as yet possessed but also a greater finish and art in its expression. It became more distinctly a subject for poetry ; and it kept for a long time Gray's moral and philosophic touch. But this was not all he did for Romanticism. He recalled to English poetry the rude, ancient history—crowded stories, the legends and the wonders of the bardic tales of the early Britons, of mediaeval Wales and of the Norse mythology. He opened out that new world of Romance, though only short translations. He welcomed Percy's Reliques, the Celtic bric-a-brac of Macpherson's "Ossian", and pitied ; though he exposed, the romantic forgeries of Chatterton. Moreover, those rude romantic tales of Wales chimed in with his love of rude and savage scenery, in which he designed to wander alone in picturesque thought.

In all this he initiated a new romantic impulse or at least gave the impulse a practical, poetical form."

(e) To Sum Up.

The main characteristics of the classical or rather the "pseudo-classical" age (as it was really a degenerate kind of classicism which the school of Pope followed instead of true Classicism, associated with the works of original Greek and Latin writers) of the Romantic period are indicated below after the manner of Hudson :

1. *Classicism*.—(a) Classical poetry is deficient in emotion and imagination—two essential elements of real poetry. Lyrics are, therefore, rare in this age. Wit and intelligence are given much more prominence than emotion and imagination. Naturally the spirit of the poetry of the period is basically didactic and satiric. (b) The poetry of the age is exclusively town poetry. It deals with the interest of society in the important centres of culture. It is completely integrated with social life. This is seen in Augustan literature in which all writers keep themselves within the social context, for the point of reference of the 18th century literature was the society and not the individual. Classical poetry invariably deals with contemporary life. Pope is a true representative of this school of poetry as he gives a faithful image of such life and his vision is confined to the drawing-room of upper-class society but the humbler life, the life of the lower-class people is not represented in Pope's poetry. Moreover, there is no real love of Nature or love of rural life. (c) In classical poetry there is very little of enthusiasm and exuberance of imagination. It is all cold, measured, unemotional and full of kind of artificial dignity. Moderation in everything is the key-note of classical poetry. (d) Form and outward polish are much more important in classical poetry than the subject-matter itself. Poets did not care much about what they said as long as the way of saying things was polished, refined and correct according to rules. Superficial elegance was the main concern of most of the poets of the classical schools. Hence a highly artificial and conventional tone soon developed into an insane poetic diction. Simplicity and directness of expression were deliberately replaced by artificial phraseology and pompous circumlocutions. (e) Classical poetry adhered to the closed couplet, i.e.

2. *Romanticism*.—The reaction against Classicism on the above five points due to the operation of psychological forces, movements and influences towards Romanticism, may be indicated below :

(b) Poetry ceased to concern itself exclusively with the town. It began to deal with Nature and rustic life. It became subjective, introversive and introspective, as a result of the reaction of the 'id' (individual self) against the 'super ego' (society) arising out of the suppressed desires of the individual struggling hard to find an outlet of creative activity. This explains why the creative artists of the earlier 18th century (the pre-Romantics) broke away from the artificial limitations imposed by the social hierarchy dominated by Johnson. They began to give expression to their individual desires and emotions once more as did the Elizabethans in their own day :

The development of Naturalism, or as it is broadly called 'Return to Nature' meant a rising sense of all that is implied in the contrast between Nature and civilisation—in the expression of individuality and a radical simplification of life. All this led to greater simplicity in the choice of subject-matter, in the passions described and in the language employed. In spite of Johnson's ridicule of the old ballads and folk-myths, people began to be interested more and more in them. This discovery of beauty in them led to a change in taste, which ultimately proved fatal to all the theories of the Augustan school about elegance and effect. The return to Nature itself is a mode of education of the Romantic reactions which is concerned with the revival of the handling in

poetry of subjects connected with external Nature in a natural manner.

(c) The Romantic Revival brought with it great changes in the themes and the temper of the verse. Now began a literary interest in the writer's country as a whole in both time and space, an interest based on personal experience or antiquarian research. There is revival of Lyricism, and poetry is pervaded by the Romantic note of Melancholy.

(d) Efforts were now made to break away from the trammels of Classicism—from the stereotyped conventions of poetic diction, from the awareness that the new poetry must have a different style and to substitute for these simplicity of phrase and the language of Nature.

(e) The supremacy of the heroic couplet was attacked and other forms of verse after the manner of Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton, for example, were the principal immediate cause of the rise and popularity of blank verse. Spenser helped to open up for the new generation the under-world of chivalry, knight-errantry and mediaeval romance in the Spenserian stanza.

3. *Classical and Romantic Contributions of Gray.* (a) *Classical Contributions.* According to some critics Gray was a truer classicist than the so-called classical writers of the age—Pope and Johnson—who are rightly adjudged today as to have been only pseudo-classical. From his notes on Plato and Aristophanes we can see that his motto was like that of Collins, viz., "to revive the just designs of Greece." A critic of the stature of Matthew Arnold would even place him almost at the summit of English poetry for his "passion for structure and finish for proportion, economy and unity" according to the classical dogma. But the element of romantic sensibility and spontaneity is also present in his later poetry and Gray "does not seem to possess the necessary creative force to make the psychological effort of a synthesis between the two elements—classical lucidity and romantic spontaneity—without lowering the standard of either while sustaining both at their highest possible pitch." Gray makes no attempt at such a synthesis and in many cases he gives up his romantic spontaneity and chooses to settle down with

the lawmakers of the Age of Pope and Johnson—the advocates of order, propriety, symmetry and sobriety. As Prof. Cazamian has said, “In fact, Gray’s art does not dominate the conflict of tendencies; he makes a choice and takes a side; he clearly settles down with the friends of discipline and order.”

He wrote a didactic poem in the heroic couplet (on the “Alliance of Education and the Government”)—a strictly classical piece written under the influence of Dryden and the School of Pope. Thereafter his three popular short Odes were also written in the traditional classical style (viz., on the “Spring”; “Eton College”; and “To Adversity”).

The romantic spirit first emerged in his “Elegy” but even in all this and later poems we miss the intimate self-revelation and that monologue of the soul confronted with Nature the personal note peculiar to the romantics. A generalising tendency is present in Gray’s treatment of inanimate Nature,—the outcome of his adherence to the pseudo-classical tradition. There is, besides, an avowed spirit of didacticism noticeable in his poetry. His “Elegy” is but a record of dull and drab moralising on human life and death. In his poetic diction he was a thorough-going classicist. He advocated the artificial and stilted diction of 18th century poetry when he held that “the language of the age is never the language of poetry.” Some features of the poetic diction of the age, common to Gray, may be mentioned: (1) Balance of words and short phrases, whether antithetical or not—a feature of Pope’s poetry, also shared by Gray in his “Eton Ode”, “Elegy” etc. (2) Inversion of order (A transitive verb is very often put after both subject and object, and an adverbial phrase often comes between a subject and a verb). This feature is common in Pope as well as in Gray’s “Odes”. (3) The predicative use of an adjective for an adverb—a Miltonic style used in his “Hymn to Adversity”, and Sonnet. (4) The use of an abstract for a concrete noun often with a conscious personification; this feature is common in Pope as well as in Gray. (5) Poetic vocabulary, based on a conscious imitation of the Latin poets in illustration of Gray’s thesis that “the language of the age is never the language of poetry.” (6) Personification, deification and mythologising, as parts of inheritance from the Latin poets of

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 the Augustan Age, shared by English classicists. It will, thus, be seen that Gray's language is not marked by the romantic surcharge, *i. e.*, that elusive and mysterious quantity which gives to every line of the regular Romantics (like Keats, Wordsworth and Coleridge) "a meaning wider and deeper than that actually expressed by the words employed". The same romantic tinge is lacking in his love for the Middle Ages also. His poetry does not give us any indication of his love for the freedom of mankind which is deeply rooted in the romantic poets nor does he espouse the cause of the down-trodden and the destitute. His melancholy was very different, from the out-and-out pessimism of the Romantics, as "his temperamental outlook was qualified by the profoundly moral attitude of the Age in which he lived."

(b) *Romantic Contribution.*

A chronological study of his poetry reveals the gradual trend towards Romanticism, though Classicism persisted throughout. 'Melancholy' with him is something constitutional, his note of tenderness has a winning sweetness..... Thus it is that Gray's classical poetry contains within itself effects of subtle fitness and suggestion which foreshadow Romanticism "The triumph of this sensibility allied to so much art is to be seen in the famous 'Elegy' which forms a somewhat reasoning and moralizing emotion and which has deduced a grave, full, melodiously monotonous song, in which a century weaned from the music of the soul tasted all the sadness of even tide, of death and of the tender musing upon self."— (Cazamian). The note of melancholy begins with the early poems of 1742 and stays with him throughout.

The two Pindaric Odes of the second period show Gray well on his way towards Romanticism. "The poetry of Gray abounds in all the seeds of the coming age; it is wholly animated by emotions which around it are preparing the rejuvenation of literature." Gray brings active imagination to play upon his theme and enriches it with tender sentiment though not with convincing passion. The undying appeal of his "Elegy" to the luxury of soft sentiment is sure to find an echo in every heart. The two Odes are written on themes which have an emotional basis. He was one of the first to feel the attraction of the Middle Ages and of Scandinavian antiquity.

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Gray's last period marks him out definitely as a pioneer of the Romantic Revival. Lyricism is another feature of Romanticism. Though avowedly written on classical patterns, the Pindaric Odes are full of the lyrical spirit. This is not all. "Gray recalled to English poetry the rude, ancient history-crowded stories, the legends, and wonders of the bardic tales of the early Britons, of mediaeval Wales, and of the Norse mythology. He opened out that new world of Romance, though not in short translations.....The rude romantic tales of Wales chimed in with his love of rude and savage scenery, in which he delighted to wander alone in picturesque thought. In all this he initiated a new romantic impulse or at least gave the impulse a practical poetic form. "It was Gray's conventionalism of the style that stood in the way of his poetry breaking out into Naturalism even in his early poetry. This is a fact which is proved by his letters which show his remarkable feeling for Nature and a great power of description.

4

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS POETRY

Gray's poetry was so unfamiliar to his Age and so unlike the sort of poetry in vogue that it on its production, astonished his contemporaries.—However, it, made its way with the passage of time. Mitford, Gray's second biographer, remarks that "the works which were either neglected or ridiculed by their contemporaries have now raised Gray and Collins to the rank of our greatest lyric poets." After the lapse of some time, surely, Gray's reputation was established and stood extremely high, even if they were not so popular. Beattie, writing to Sir William Forbes at the end of the eighteenth century, says, "Of all the English poets of his age Mr. Gray is most admired and I think with justice." Cowper also records his appreciation in the following words : "I have been reading Gray's works and think him the only poet since Shakespeare entitled to the character of 'sublime'. Perhaps you will remember that I once had a different opinion of him. I was prejudiced." Adam Smith says, "Gray joins to the sublimity of Milton, the elegance and harmony of Pope ; and nothing is wanting to render him, perhaps, the first poet in the English language, but to have written a little more." And, to come nearer to our own times, Sir James Mackintosh reminds us, moreover that to all the other accomplishments and merits of Gray, we are to add this, "that he was the first discoverer of the beauties of Nature in England, and has marked out of the course of every picturesque journey that can be made in it," He continues to say, "Of all English poets he was the first finished artist. He attained the highest degree of splendour of which poetical style seemed to be capable."

1. *Sentiment and Emotion.*—What are the chief merits that make Gray a poet of such magnitude? The first and foremost of them are the glimpses of sentiment and emotion, which, later on, were cultivated by the romantic poets. Gray's early poems have a touch of cold intellectuality but his "Elegy", the "Poem of Poems", and his "Pindaric Odes" have been profusely infused by a sentimental and emotional tone. The "Elegy" owes its popularity and undying appeal to the soft sentiments that pervade it. Swinburne, who, in his ardour to do justice to Collins, has been deeply and extravagantly unjust to the greater man, Gray has been obliged to bless this "Poem of Poems" such high perfection and universal appeal to the tenderest and noblest depths of human feeling. Both the "Odes", again,—"The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard"—and especially the latter have been written on themes, "which have an emotional basis, which liberate the imagination 'to the climes beyond the solar path' or to 'steep of Snowdon's shaggy side.'" In the words of Phelps, "The poetry of Gray abounds in all the seeds of the coming Age. It is wholly animated by emotions which around it are preparing the rejuvenation of literature." Gray, indeed, knows the task of enriching his themes with tender sentiments for which, he brought his active imagination to play upon the emotional current of his inspiring thoughts.

2. *Love of Nature.*—Gray was alive to the external manifestations of Nature and observed them curiously, as is clear from his reflections in his poems. Instead of being fresh and new, his visions of Nature are discreet and pretty. They are objective. The sublimity of the Alps and the religious horror of high mountains are frank expressions of his visions,—things as others would see them. Again, in the opening lines of the "Elegy", he presents the close of the day remarkably and beautifully. In the two Odes, referred to above, Nature is presented in its rich objective variety. The scenic descriptions of the Welsh mountains render the poem beautiful and elevated.

Gray's love of Nature and his capacity for understanding its manifestations, is evident from his correspondence to his friends. In one of his letters to West, he writes:

"In our little journey up to the Grande Chartreuse, I do not remember to have gone ten paces without exclaiming—"

tion that there was no restraining. Not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry. There are certain scenes that would awe an atheist into belief, without the help of other argument. One need not have a very fantastic imagination to see spirits there at noon-day; you have death perpetually before your eyes only so far removed, as to compose the mind without frightening it "

The above lines are the key to Gray's conception of Nature which, with its inexhaustible orgy and rich treasures, stirred a Wordsworth to imagine that it was a Power or a Soul next only to the Soul of all Souls, a Shelley to realise, alike Wordsworth, that Nature was gifted with abundant life and movement and was capable of affecting human destiny, while to a Keats the splendour and beauty of Nature was for beauty's sake and for poetry's sake. But for a poet like Gray who constantly harped on the shams of life and uncertainty of human destiny, the entire natural wealth stirred a feeling of awe and excited pathetic funeral feelings which have found a vent in 'An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard', in which the parting day forms a suitable background to the poet's mood of melancholy contemplation. Accurate and minute observations of natural phenomenon and the patient-watching of the life of beasts and insects were the favourite hobbies of Gray as is evident from the following lines quoted from his poem entitled 'The Alliance of Education and Government' :

"As sickly plant betrays a niggard earth,
Whose barren bosom starves her generous birth,
Nor genial warmth, nor genial juice retains
Their roots to feed and fill their verdant veins."

The mighty imagery of mountains, current broad and sweeping at places, tumultuous and raving at others, introduced in the very opening of the "Progress of Poesy" and the scenic descriptions of the Welsh mountains in the "Bard" are some of the examples of pure Nature poetry contributing not a little to the solemnity of the tragic story. A few lines from David Cecil will be found relevant for the study of Gray's love of Nature. He says, "Precisely he (Gray) discerns the features in the same that gives it its character exquisitely, he responds to its sentiment. Yes it never sweeps him right away in Ruskin

4. *Musical Quality of Gray's Verses*—The versification of Gray possesses exquisite musical sweetness and about his diction he himself tells that "the style I have aimed at is extreme conciseness of expression yet pure, perspicuous and musical." Gray's style has the dignity of Milton and stately march of his verse resembles that of Dryden. The fondness of elegance coupled with the use of musical cadences, which is the characteristic trait of Gray, imparts to his poem a rich rhythmical harmony and solemn musical effect.

5. *Pictorial Power*.—If appeal to imagery is an indication of great poetry, Gray's poetry must be assigned the very highest place. He shows exquisite skill in calling up pictures of every phase or event in history or scene in Nature with the help of a few bold strokes of his erudite pen. The "Elegy" calls up sights and scenes of the countryside. His "Bard" presents the figure of the cursing bard, a succession of scenes concerning the fate of the descendants of Edward I and the final self-immolation of the bard as living images which strike the imagination at once. No less graphic are the pictures called up before the mind by such phrases as "many-twinking feet or feathered-cinctured chief" in the other poem.

6. *Evolution of Thought*—Even more important than the sweet music and clarity of his verse is the conscious planning or evolution of thought in his poems, proceeding out of his craze for formal perfection. 'Evolution' in poetical criticism describes the mode in which a poem is built up or grows up like a building into the certain form which is the most appropriate and sufficient for the thoughts and images which possess the poet's mind. The least inspired of Gray's poems has this peculiarity—this architectonic skill in building a poetic structure from beginning to end in a rational and systematic manner. Gray's art is invariably disciplined by his intellect and refined by his cultured taste. Thus each of poems is logically designed with a beginning, a middle and an end in every line, nay every phrase contributing to the general effect.

7. *Originality of Themes*—Gray is considered to be the most original of all the transitional poets in the selection of his themes. It is in his poetry that we have, for the first time, a departure from the treatment of urban life. Poetry of the

classical age, written under the inspiration of Alexander Pope, is purely related to the depiction of urban life, the fashions of the ladies and the manners of the Court. Gray is the first poet who departs from this beaten track of town life and concentrates his attention on the Middle Ages and the Norse and Scandinavian mythology. His originality is endorsed by Cazamian who writes that "he was the first to feel the attraction of the Middle Ages and of Scandinavian antiquity.....The 'Bard', and specially, the 'Fatal Sisters' and the 'Descent of Odin' composed before the publication of Perey's 'Reliques' are, as it were, soundings taken in mediaeval superstition, of primitive legends and beliefs of simple and popular wonder, the depth and fecundity of which were to be gradually realized."

8. *Note of Melancholy* —The note of melancholy, a note common to his contemporaries, pervades all his work. It springs from his very constitution, because his early life was sad and gloomy. He makes a reference to his early sufferings in the "Elegy". The presentation of the life of the country-people is also coloured by the same gloomy note. In fact, there is the presence of tender melancholy in almost all his poems.

"For him human life was a painful affair
And they that creep, and they that fly
Shall end where they began
Alike the busy and the gay."

And happiness was not even an occasional episode in the general drama of pain.

".....all are men
Condemned alike to groan,
The tender for another's pain,
The unfeeling for his own."

Miseries never come alone and happiness never stays too long :

"Yet, ah, why should they know their fate ?
Since sorrow never comes too late
And happiness too swiftly flies."

Even if we have happiness, we do not have it unmixed :

"Still, where rosy pleasure leads
See a kindred grief pursue."

Gray's melancholy found a splendid expression in the "Elegy" where alone it seems, he discovered his true soul :

"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth ever gave,
Awaits alike the inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

9. *Artistic Finish*.—Gray is an artist. He polishes every line that he writes. Naturally there is the artistic finish of a skilled craftsman. There is perfect felicity of expression in his poetry. His "Elegy" and his "Odes" are his great works of art. He is consummate and skilled artist and the exquisite sense of proportion and order, coupled with the careful construction and attention to the merit of form, impart to his verses an artistic perfection and clarity of thought. It is because of his attentive art that the Poetry of Thomas Gray is saved from passivity, and he surpasses all his contemporaries in imaginative observation, delicate feeling for the right word in the right place and harmony of tone and perfection of form. He has given a definite expression to his ideas and, therefore, his poems abound with striking passages.

There is, however, evidence of a laboured art in his poems and because of this his art turns into artifice. All his poems, in a way, are so polished that they have lost the element of naturalness and spontaneity. But this defect does not belittle his poems. They leave an impression of an artistic finish of a skilled craftsman. What Sir Mackintosh writes is quite true of his poetry. "Of all English poets he was the most finished artist. He attained the highest degree of splendour that his poetic style seemed to be capable."

10. *Universality*.—Gray had truly realised that the function of poetry was not to picture the age but also to strike certain notes, which could hold true for all times to come. His "Elegy" has certain lines which do hold true for all times to come. How true are these lines to life :

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear
Full many a flower are born to blush unseen,
And waste their fragrance on the desert air."

Indeed no time and no age can state the above lines. Again, the description of the churchyard, in the "Elegy," abounds

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in images which find a mirror in every mind and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo. And, his ode too, the "Ode to Adversity", has an universal appeal. Its appeal lies in its variety of the sentiments and their moral application.

1. Obscurity.

There are, however, certain blemishes in Gray's poetry. The first charge against it levelled by the critics is that of obscurity, which is twofold. The one is the obscurity of subject, the other is of the language. The obscurity of subject is no longer a blemish now. With the expansion of knowledge, wider learning and the study of history of other countries, this defect has lost its ground. The other blemish, however, stands even today. In the choice of his words, he has a peculiarity of using compound words, such as :

"Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower,"
and,

"The breezy call of incense-breathing morn."

Too much craze for rhetoric and allegory, his preference of stateliness to simplicity, of artificial and circumlocutory expression and the profuse use of personification for the sake of sonorousness to a simple diction—all these are extremes which mar the natural flow of his poetry, but Gray could not perhaps help it, as a belief in this kind of extremely artificial language went by the name of poetry in his age.

2. Artificiality.

Gray's style is highly artificial. He is in the habit of making frequent use of tropes and antithesis. Abstractions, allusions, and grandiose paraphrases decorate his style. The use of compound words as "feathered-king" for an eagle or compound phrases like "ruddy drops that warm my heart" for blood, appears to be a load without any poetic value. The "Progress of Poesy" is full of such expressions :

"They sought O Albion ! next thy sea-encircled coast."
And,

"The living throne, the sapphire-blaze,
Where Angels tremble, while they gaze,
He saw ; but blasted with excess of light,
Closed his eyes in endless night."

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Indeed, he is so fond of compound words and roundabout expressions that every important noun from his pen has its inevitable adjective—"sudden cares," "frantic passions," "antic sports," "blue-eyed pleasures," "huge pinlimmon" etc.

All these features, viz., ridiculous circumlocution, round-about expression, avoidance of the common place etc, were characteristic of the Age and were common in the poetry of the time. Gray's use of them shows his incapacity to introduce a fresh style of writing to synchronize with the new subject matter and to go beyond the contemporary language of verse.

3. Personifications and Allegories.

Two other defects of his poetry were excessive use of allegory and rhetoric and a too frequent recurrence of uninspired personifications of abstract qualities with only an initial capital. They remind us of the tricks of the classical poets. They are not poetically conceived and so their allegorical value is doubtful. They are sometimes so vague that, as Coleridge observes in his remarks on the well-known passage in the "Bard"—'youth at the prow and pleasure at the helm.' 'It depends wholly in the compositor's putting or not putting a capital both in this and many other passages, whether the words should be personifications or mere abstracts.' Gray seemed to be obsessed with the idea that simply by using capital letters, a new mythology could be shaped out of the vices and virtues—'Generous shame,' 'Freedom's holy flame,' 'Amazement in his van' etc.—These are glaring instances of excessive and uninspired use of personifications arising out of what may be called his 'mythological' tendency.

4. Rhetoric.

Exclamations, declamations, apostrophes etc., range freely in his poetry, e. g., 'Say, has he given in vain the heavenly Muse?' 'They sought O Albion! next thy sea-encircled coast,' 'The scourge of heaven,' 'What terrors round him wait,' are typical examples. They breathe no contagion because they themselves are intellectually and emotionally conceived.

5. Difficulty of Form.

The best of his poems, with the single exception of the "Elegy" conform to one or the other forms of ancient poetry. His poetic vocabulary arises out of a conscious imitation of the Latin poets. His Pindaric Odes conform to the forms of

from other gifted minds. But still there is a higher appearance of culture than fertility, of acquisition than originality in Gray. He is not a being of independent imagination, that native and creative spirit, of whom we should say, that he would have plunged into the flood of poetry had there been none to leap before him. Nor were learned acquisitions turned to the very highest account. He was the architect of no poetical design of extensive or intricate compass."

Likewise, Prof. Saintsbury assigns Gray a place among the second-rate poets in his book, *The Poets of the Augustans* :

"It is impossible to assign to Gray that poignant and surprising power of clothing or bodying thought with musical and picturesque form—that almost supernatural gift of exploding, as it were, from the narrow case of a lonely word or a small group of words, volumes of suggestion and association of beauty—which belongs to the highest poetry. The kind of stupor on the one hand, of enthusiastic flush on the other, which is caused by the rarest things in Homer, Aeschylus, Lucretius, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne, Heine, Hugo, never comes from any verse or line or word in him. Collins had, or come near to having, this power. Gray never showed it And this cannot but be set down as defect—as a defect, of course, serious and to its own extent fatal."

5

SLOW OUTPUT OF GRAY'S POETRY

Gray's production was scanty. Various explanations have been offered for its scantiness. It has been said that his health was never sound and that he could not be active because of his bad health. But there are examples, in English literature, where men of genius have spoken far too much, though they have been invalid. Pope is one who had "that long disease." Schiller is another, who suffered all his life from gout. Both of them have left behind a rich produce of poetry. So this explanation does not hold good.

The first and foremost reason is his poverty. The power of his genius cannot be denied but on account of poverty, his immense capabilities were hampered. He had little occasion for happiness and delight. There was all sadness and melancholy in him. So he could not produce much in his lifetime. He had made a frank confession of it in a letter to Horace Walpole, where he writes : "As to what you say to me civilly, that I ought to write more. I will be candid and avow to you, that till four score and upward, whenever the humour takes me, I will write, because I like it and because I like myself better when I do so. If I do not write much, it is because I cannot." What a frank and true confession it is. He does not write much because he cannot.

Matthew Arnold has suggested another reason for his scantiness. According to Arnold, Gray was born in a wrong age. He was a born poet, but fell upon an Age of Prose. "He fell upon an age whose task was such as to call forth in general men's powers of understanding, wit and cleverness, rather than their deepest powers of mind and soul. As regards

literary production, his task of the eighteenth century in England was not the poetic interpretation of the world, its task was to create a plain, clear, straight-forward, efficient prose. Poetry obeyed the bent of mind requisite for the due fulfilment of this task of the century. It was intellectual, argumentative, ingenious; not seeing things in their truth and beauty, not interpretative. "In this Age of Prose, Gray, with the qualities of mind and soul of a genuine poet, was isolated in this century. The want of genial atmosphere and the failure of sympathy in his contemporaries were too great. Had Gray been born in the year when Milton was born, he would have been, another man. Had he been born in the year when Burns was born, he would have been, again, another man." "Coming when he did, and endowed as he was, he was a man born out of date."

Phelps, however, does not accept Arnold's plea. According to Phelps, Gray was not the man to feel depressed by an unfavourable environment. He was always open to new things and new influences. The real reason of his scantiness is to be found in the temperamental character of the man. Belonging to the age of prose, he was always rational and severely critical. This type of temperament does not help one in being creative. "The time that Mason spent in production, Gray spent in acquisition and when he did produce, he produced it with painstaking labour." The habit of labouring with each line of his composition and the 'notion that he would not write but at certain times or at a happy moment may also be accounted as one of the reasons for his scantiness.'

Bonstetten, a friend of Gray, holds the same view as Arnold does. He holds that the age in which Gray lived and cherished his imagination through poetical pieces was unfavourable to him because the writings of this period demand wit and cleverness rather than the deepest powers of mind and soul. It was more correctly an age of prose in which Gray did not find a response and "if Gray like Burns had been just thirty years old when the French Revolution broke out, he would have shown, probably, productiveness and animation in plenty."

Oliver Elton's estimate appears to be more correct. Giving reasons for Gray's scantiness, he writes: "There is little to

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show that his talent was blighted, as Matthew Arnold thought, by the spirit of the time. Probably he would never have written much, although a century later he would have written otherwise. He disturbed himself, cherished a rigid ideal of perfection in form and was never satisfied with his work..... He did not like Shelley or Wordsworth dedicate his art to art or the uplifting of mankind. He wrote his verse in the intervals of taking notice about a hundred other things, Plato's Dialogues, or English metres, or Norman architecture, or the orders of insects. Poetry was among his favourite pursuits, and he was one of the wise who prefer reading to writing."

Three reasons, therefore—his scholarly temperament, his bad health, and his dignified reserve account satisfactorily for his scantiness.

6

GRAY'S POSITION IN LITERATURE

We commonly divide the history of Literature into periods : we speak of the Age of Anne and Victorian Era, and so on, because the writers of any one time have generally some characteristics of style, method, even of sentiment in common. The period that coincided approximately with the life of Pope (1688-1744) is often described as that of the 'Artificial School' as distinguished from that of the later romantic poets and poets of Nature. We must be careful, however, not to apply these labels too strictly. A poet does not lose his individuality even though he be greatly affected by the literary fashions of the day : some indeed transcend these fashions and by their genius anticipate and help to form the spirits of the coming age. Such a writer was Gray ; his is an elusive spirit not to be classified precisely and pinned down as a specimen. In some ways no one was more 'artificial', no one was more representative of some of the literary habits of the 18th century. Yet at times, he developed a lyrical form and a simplicity of diction characteristic of earlier and later periods. We will now briefly describe the characteristics which are generally, or at least very frequently, found in writers of the "Artificial School". The student can then judge for himself how far they are found in Gray also.

The period was noted for a remarkable attention to form, to the development of a style at once simple and efficient. Its principal literary achievement was the evolution by Dryden, Defoe, Swift, Addison, Steele and others of a clear and vigorous prose style, and the application by Dryden and Pope

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 of the artistic limitations of French verse which should render the English couplet equally brilliant and correct.

This close attention to style had certain disadvantages. It limited the range of thought and feeling. One may lose sight of the spiritual significance of a thought by considering too exclusively how it may be brilliantly expressed. Thus the appeal of poetry in the eighteenth century was rather to the intellect than to the heart and soul. The writer most admired as "the wit" the clever thinker with a gift of sparkling epigrammatic expression. Hence the province of poetry was limited by the limitation of its aim. It was limited also in its choice of subject-matter.

Like the prose-writer, the poet became affected by the better party-feeling of the time between Whig and Tory, Churchman and Dissenter, Hanoverian and Jacobite. Much of his work is satire, and the satire is best when it is personal. He writes for his own friends, his own party, for the literary people who frequented the coffee-houses, whom he calls "The Town". Much of his work strikes one as the best kind of club-talk. He is no longer the prophet, who unfolds the mysteries of our being : he has become the critic, not the interpreter of life.

Now the habit of moralising and criticising was nothing new. From the time of the Anglo-Saxons, England has been the home of poet-preachers of satires on the evils of society, of reflections on the uncertainty of life. This didactic spirit was never more vocal than in the eighteenth century. We hear it in the great satires of Pope. We also hear it in Blair's "The Grave", in Johnson's "The Vanity of Human Wishes", and in Young's "The Last Day". In fact the appearance of so great a host of poets, animated by a desire to teach us, simply alarms us.

Gray is also a didactic one. And, one more thing about him is that his subject-matter is even more limited than that of other didactic writers of his age. His serious poems are of two types—firstly, those inspired by the gentle melancholy in which he passes from the expression of his own sorrows to a consideration of the sorrows of humanity, secondly, those

dealing with the history of poetry. In both he follows the fashion of his Age. Yet much of this vast mass of didactic poetry is now forgotten, while the few short poems of Gray are the chief glory of the eighteenth century. The explanation is that Gray was, in a way, 'touched with a coal from heaven'. If he fails to attain to the first rank, it is perhaps because he lacks the joy in his work, the enthusiasm which is the highest gift of the Teacher and the Poet; and this lack of enthusiasm was also characteristic of the Age.

Another characteristic of the period is the excessive use of personification, mythological allusions, periphrasis and of words and phrases supposed to be suitable to poetry, but which are not commonly used in conversation. These characteristics together form what is called the 'poetic diction' of the eighteenth century. Gray justified this fashion. In one of his letters to West, he writes :

"The language of the age is never the language of poetry except among the French. Our poetry on the contrary, has a language peculiar to itself."

This theory of 'poetic diction' was rejected by Wordsworth some sixty years later. He says :

"The language of a good poem must in no respect differ from that of good prose."

Wordsworth has written his poems in "a selection of language really used by men." According to Wordsworth, the Poetic Diction is "a family language which writers in metre seem to lay claim to by prescription.....phrase and figures of speech which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets." Despite Wordsworth's disagreement with Gray's diction, Gray's diction has its merits and to understand this, we must accustom ourselves with—

(a) Personification ; (b) Mythological Allusions ; and (c) Poetic Terms.

Personification means creation of a fictitious person for the purpose of brief, and vivid illustration. This figure of speech was frequently employed in classical poetry and by all modern poets who based their work on it. In the old Morality

Plays and Interludes, the personages represented were the various vices and virtues and the true Drama became possible only when these abstractions were banished from the stage in favour of real men and women. They were never banished from non-dramatic poetry. Personification is really a difficult figure requiring vivid imagination for its creation. When Gray speaks of 'Wild Laughter, Noise and thoughtless Joy' ("Hymn to Adversity"), his personifications are little more than abstract nouns spelt with a capital letter. They are not mere abstraction because they are called wild and thoughtless epithets that can be applied only to living beings but they do not call up lifelike images. Shakespeare is very much nearer the mark, when he says :

"More merry tears

The passion of loud Laughter never shed."

Milton is with a model personification in his :

"Laughter holding both his sides."

Whether Gray could ever reach such a height of excellence is doubtful.

The use of Classical Mythology is again a point worthy of note. The gods and goddesses of Greece and Rome have always a place, a welcome place,—in English Literature. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they found an important place, but in the eighteenth century literature, these deities have become rather hoarse and shabby. "Jove still wields his thunder but no one is frightened. Diana's bow does not carry so far as it once did. The glorious chariot of the Sun now comes creaking from a stable in Grub Street. The doves of Venus have almost ceased to coo and the poet of "The Season" even tells us that he prefers the milk of the cocoanut to the grapes of Bachhus.

In regard to the Poetic Terms, Gray has many such phrases —Attic warbler ; The sportive kind ; The rolling circle ; The Genii of the stream ; The tuneful choir The reason of it perhaps is that Gray drew from Milton, who drew from Italian and Classical writers. Gray is too fond of using epithets, so much so that he puts the adjective after the noun, —for instance :

'Baron bold.....statesman old.' — *The Bard.*

At places, he uses two adjectives :

'A gem of purest ray serene.' — *Elegy.*

He also uses compound adjectives :

'Ivy-mantled', 'awe-commanding'.

And, also uses an adjective for an adverb :

'I fruitless mourn.' — *Sonnet.*

7

THE MERITS OF GRAY'S POETRY

Gray has a deep influence of the age in which he lived. We trace it in his ornate rhetorical diction, in his rather morbid sentiment, in the limited scope of his interests. But how is it that when Gray speaks, all the world listens, while all the other didactic poets of the period, with the exception of Pope, are practically forgotten. Perhaps the first and greatest quality of his verse is the air of distinction that invests all he says and compels attention. When Gray deals with history, he contrives to throw over commonplace details, the glamour of romance and mystery. When he deals with the problems of human life, his most obvious reflections seem to have almost the force of revelation.

Another striking merit is "the extreme conciseness of expression" at which, Gray tells us, he aimed. This is connected with his sense of artistic proportion. In the great odes especially, we notice the orderly development by which each is built up into an organic whole, and the strict economy of detail. These qualities give us a sense of power in reserve. When we contrast these Odes with the flux of words and rambling structure of other poets of the century (except Pope) we realise the superiority of Gray.

Not only does he aim at conciseness but also at making his verse 'pure, perspicuous and musical', though he sadly says, "I never could attain this." Perhaps, not always, but surely he did attain his ideal in a great measure. When we consider the sweet lingering music that he gets out of his difficult Elegiac measure; the rolling and varied music of the great Odes; the metrical effects of his translations from the Norse,

especially in the 'Descent of Odin', with its recurrent 'Leave me, leave me to repose', and the little thrills of song such as that quoted above from the 'Ode on Vicissitude' or the couplet set in a rather prosaic passage in the 'Ode for Music' :

"Their tears, their little triumphs over,
Their human passion now no more."

Surely, his verse is musical. The following lines speak of his felicitous expressions :

"The Pomp and Prodigality of Heaven;
"Where ignorance is bliss,
'Tis folly to be wise."
"Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear :
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste in sweetness on the desert air."

In the 'Bard' and the translations from the Norse and Welsh, Gray gave impetus and direction to that interest in the Romantic part—"that hark-back to mediaevalism", as Mason calls it.

Gray may be regarded as a formative influence on Wordsworth as well as on Scott. Considering how greatly Wordsworth disliked the diction of Gray and his attitude towards Nature, it is curious to note that in his Ode on 'Intimations of Immortality' and in his poem, 'To the Skylark', he uses the very words of Gray's Ode on 'Vicissitude'. It is a profitable study to compare Gray's Ode on 'Adversity' with Wordsworth's still greater Ode to 'Duty', and trace the influence of the earlier poet on the later.

His influence may be traced to later poets still, Keats, Byron, Shelley and Tennyson, whose ornate diction shows traces of a revival of the best qualities of the 'Artificial School'. Indeed Gray's few poems, though he wrote very little, have made his name immortal, because they are "Thoughts, that breathe and words that burn" and also because they are written "with a Master's hand and Prophet's fire".

8

OPINIONS

"I have been reading Gray's works and think him the only poet since Shakespeare entitled to the character of sublime. Perhaps you will remember that I once had a different opinion of him. I was prejudiced."

—Cowper.

"Gray joins to the sublimity of Milton the elegance and harmony of Pope, and nothing is wanting to render him perhaps, the first poet in English language, but to have a little more."

—Adam Smith.

"Of all the English poets he (Gray) was the most finished artist. He attained the highest degree of splendour of which poetical style seemed to be capable."

—Sir James Mackintosh.

"Mr. Gray was perhaps the most learned man in Europe. He knew every branch of history both natural and civil, had read all the original historians of England, France and Italy; was a great antiquarian. Criticism, Metaphysics, Morals, Politics made a principal part of his studies. Voyages and travels of all sorts were his favourite amusements and he had a fine taste in painting, prints, architecture and gardening."

—Temple.

"The slender inspiration of Gray has produced some exquisite fruits, because already profiting from the rise of new sap, it retains the benefit of a learned and refined culture. The reasoning aridness of classical poetry is here by an inner progress, enriched and made more mellow, the luxuriance and

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uncertainty of romanticism are neutralised in advance by the authority of choice and taste, that still remain sovereign. A poetry such as this makes one feel what was lacking in the excessive intellectuality of the Age of Pope by mastering and sublimating emotional impulse in sober form, it approximates both in letter and in spirit to an ideal classicism, one that would represent discipline without impoverishment, it suggests the memory of the masterpieces which have, at times, to achieve this distinction."

—*Louis Cazamian.*

"To say that he has no beauties would be unjust. A man like him, of great learning and great industry could not but produce something valuable. When he pleases least it can only be said that a good design was ill-directed."

—*Johnson.*

"It may be collected from the narrative of Mr. Mason that his first ambition was to have exalted in Latin poetry, perhaps it were reasonable to wish that he had prosecuted his design, for though there is at present some embarrassment in his phrase and some harshness in his lyric numbers, his copiousness of language is such as very few possess, and his lines, even imperfect discover a writer when practice would quickly have made skilful."

—*Johnson.*

"Compared not with the works of the great masters of golden age of poetry but with the poetry of his own contemporaries, in general, Gray's may be said to have reached in style, the excellence of which he aimed, while the evolution also of such pieces as his 'Progress of Poesy' must be accounted not less noble and sound than its style."

—*Matthew Arnold.*

"Broadly what he did was to take all that appealed to him in the manner of Dryden and of Dryden's followers, and to blend them into something of his own, to translate so to speak into the idiom or rather into successive forms of it, whatever he wished to say. We must not then think of him too much as a rebel against the verse of his period or a fore-staller of latter poetry. He did not so regard himself and would hardly have been so honoured in his lifetime had he been so regarded. He was felt not to have broken with the existing traditions but to have worked within them in an original way."

—*Elton.*

“What I have learned to me from the slight inspections of his letters in which my undertaking has engaged me, is, that his mind had large grasp, that his curiosity was unlimited and his judgment cultivated ; that he was a man likely to love much where he loved at all, but that he was ‘fastidious and hard to please’.”

—Johnson.

I. ELEGY

WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

1

THE curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness, and to me.

2

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds ;

3

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such as, wand'ring near her secret bower,
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

4

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

5

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twitt'ring from the straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
 Or busy housewife ply her evening care :
 No children run to lisp their sire's return,
 Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

7

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
 Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke !
 How jocund did they drive their team afield !
 How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke !

8

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
 Their homely joys, and destiny obscure ;
 Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
 The short and simple annals of the poor.

9

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
 And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
 Awaits alike th' inevitable hour :
 The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

10

Nor you, ye proud, impute to these the fault,
 If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,
 Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
 The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

11

Can storied urn or animated bust
 Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath ?
 Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
 Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death ?

12

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid

Hands, the rod of empire might have sway'd,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.

13

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page
Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll ;
Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.

14

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean hear :
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

15

Some village Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood,
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood.

16

Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
And read their history in a nation's eyes,

17

Their lot forbade : nor circumscribed alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined ;
Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind.

18

The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,
To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

19

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife
 Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray ;
 Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
 They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

20

Yet e'en these bones from insult to protect
 Some frail memorial still erected night,
 With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,
 Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

21

Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd Muse,
 The place of fame and elegy supply :
 And many a holy text around she strews,
 That teach the rustic moralist to die.

22

For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
 This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,
 Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
 Nor cast one longing ling'ring look behind ?

23

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
 Some pious drops the closing eye requires ;
 E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
 E'en in our Ashes live their wonted fires.

24

For thee, who, mindful of th' unhonour'd dead,
 Dost in these lines their artless tale relate ;
 If chance, by lonely contemplation led,
 Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,

25

Haply some hoary-headed Swain may say

Brushing with hasty steps the dew's away
 To meet the sun upon the upland lawn.

26

'There at the foot of yonder nodding beech
 That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
 His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
 And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

27

'Hard by you wood, now smiling as in scorn,
 Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove,
 Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,
 Or crazed with care, or cross'd in hopeless love.

28

'One morn I miss'd him on the custom'd hill,
 Along the heath, and near his favourite tree ;
 Another came ; no yet beside the rill,
 Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he ;

29

'The next with dirges due in sad array
 Slow through the church-way path we saw him
 born,—
 Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay
 Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn.'

THE EPITAPH

30

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth
 A Youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.
 Fair science frowned not on his humble birth,
 And Melancholy marked him for her own.

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,
 Heaven did a recompense as largely send :
 He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a tear,
 He gained from Heaven ('twas all his wished) a friend.

32

No further seek his merits to disclose,
 Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,
 (There they alike in trembling hope repose,)
 The bosom of his Father and his God.

NOTES ON ELEGY

Special Introduction

The Elegy was not composed at one sitting : probably no great poem ever was. It was begun at Stoke-Pogis in 1742. It was completed in 1750. In all, the poem took eight years with long interruptions.

The village of Stoke-Pogis lay deeply secluded in the Buckinghamshire countryside in the eighteenth century. The rich landscape of the Thames valley, its elm-shaded meadows, spreading beechwoods and high-banked winding lanes made the scenic beauty of Gray's contemplative walks and meditative moods. There also stood a Chapel of red tile or brick. This Chapel served as a place of burial and also for devotion. The untidy turf of the churchyard was shaded by ancient elms and yews. Gray associated himself with these tranquil scenes. It was the landscape he had painted in the "Ode on the Spring—'The heavy foliage Oaks', 'The noble beech-woods', 'The butterflies dancing in the hot sunshine', 'The cattle drowsing in the shade'. His eyes watched the ripening of the hay, the gradual changes in the cornfields from green to pale. His thoughts turned to the men, who laboured in those fields and woods, whose existence depended on them and who would remain buried and forgotten, under the churchyard turf, when their life's work was done and they died. He concerned himself with the life of the people of Stoke-Pogis, the men working from dawn to dusk, whose lot was poverty and toil, the usual hardships of life, a little of domestic happiness and then oblivion.

Construction

The metre of the poem is iambic pentameter. This metre was used by Dryden in his '*Annus Mirabilis*'. But the use of the heroic quatrain made Gray excel all his predecessors. But in his hands the measure became an instrument of infinite variety and beauty, "as if," says one of his biographers, "a craftsman by the mere touch of his fingers should turn ochre into gold."

Analysis

The poem begins by describing the approach of evening with its darkness and its silence, which is unbroken except for some such sounds, as those of the droning of the beetle, the tinkling of sheep's bells and the hooting of the owl. This darkness is conducive to mournful thoughts. Then it proceeds to speak of the poor people—the ancestors of the rustic population of the neighbourhood who lay deep buried under the elm and the yew in the country churchyard. Nothing can wake them from their everlasting sleep. They can no longer enjoy the family gathering round the fireplace when they returned home after the day's work. These poor villagers did the humble work of cultivation. The poet, then, requests the big and the great not to despise these poor peasants for their humble but useful work. He also requests them not to blame the poor peasants for their having no monuments erected over their graves inside the church, because, according to Gray, the poet, monuments of all kinds, tombstones with inscriptions, statues, honours, tributes are helpless to recall the dead back to life. Speaking of these peasants, the poet says, that some of these poor peasants could have been great rulers or statesmen, famous musicians or poets, if they had not been ignorant and poor. Yet cases of potential greatness are common enough, for beautiful pearls lie at the bottom unseen in the wilderness. This country churchyard may contain the grave of one who could become a popular hero like Hampden or an immortal poet like Milton or a military genius like Cromwell, but their humble lot denied them a chance of becoming great orators or great martyrs or great benefactors of their country. But, then, their humble lot, while preventing the development of their virtues, limited the nature and extent of their vices as well, so that they were saved from becoming

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from showing a callous disregard of truth and honesty and from becoming mean flatterers of the great. Living as they did aloof from the centres of busy life, they were people whose wishes were virtuous and whose lives were retired and peaceful. Nevertheless, there is some frail monument of these obscure people in the gravestones around to plead that they may not be quite forgotten. These gravestones are simply inscribed with their names, their age, and a few Biblical texts of a moral tone. These gravestones of the poor show that their desire to be remembered after death is a desire common to all men. After Gray's death too some people will talk of him, some may be curious even to visit his grave and to read the epitaph on his tomb.

Critical Appreciation

Among the writings of Gray, the Elegy stands first. In other poems, he has displayed higher qualities than are illustrated here, but in no other is the noble tone of tenderness and distinction preserved at such a perfection. For this single poem Gray stands easily at the head of all the English elegiac poets and "holds for all ages to come his unassailable and sovereign station." Elegy is perhaps the most widely known poem in English. With the exception of certain works of Byron and Shakespeare, no English poem has been so widely admired and imitated abroad. What is the secret of this extensive popularity? The answer to it perhaps is that it beautifully expresses feelings and thoughts that are common to the human breast. Pathetic composition as it is, it describes to us our own grief and our own sufferings. It is indeed, a cry of human sympathy. It always finds some disposition of our mind favourable to receive it, some passion which cannot resist its power and some feelings which participate in its sorrow. In the current of the thoughts of the Elegy, there is nothing that is rare or exceptional or out of the common way. In the reflections of the Elegy, it is difficult to conceive of anyone musing under similar circumstances who should not muse in the way Gray has done. There are some feelings and thoughts that cannot grow old. The mystery of life does not become clearer, or less solemn and awful, for any amount of contemplation. Such questions, inevitable and everlasting as they are, do rise in the mind when one reflects on the Death, and they can never lose their freshness, never cease to fascinate

It is with such questions that the Elegy deals. It deals with them in no lofty philosophical manner, but in a simple, humble, homely way, always with the truest and broadest humanity. The poet's thoughts turn to the poor ; he forgets the fine tombs inside the church and thinks only of the "mouldering heaps" in the churchyard outside. In dealing with them, he faces problems,—problems of the brevity of life, of the certainty of pain, of death and of the helplessness of man. And in these problems, he keeps on brooding and his meditations take a deeper and more universal meaning. The Elegy, therefore, is the outcome of the lonely meditations and musings of his obscure and secluded life. It is a poem, which has reached the hearts of mankind.

There are other merits which this poem possesses, and these merits go to add to the popularity of this poem. It possesses the charm of incomparable felicity of a melody that is not too subtle to delight every hearer, of a moral persuasiveness that appeals to every generation and of a metrical skill that in each line proclaims the master.

"The Elegy," in the words of Samuel Johnson, "abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo." Dr. Johnson also adds to say, "I have never seen the notions in any other place, yet he that reads them here (in this poem) persuades himself that he has always felt them." Another writer, speaking of the Elegy says, "The Elegy may almost be looked upon as the typical piece of English verse, our poem of poems ; not that it is most brilliant or original or profound lyric in our language, but because it combines, in more balanced perfection than any other, all the qualities that go to the production of a fine poetical effect."

Gray himself was, however, of the opinion that the popularity of the Elegy was due to the subject and if the subject had been treated of in prose, it would have been equally popular.

Phelps appears to differ from Gray in this regard. He attributes the popularity of this poem to the perfection of style. In his book '*The Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement*', he writes :

"The Elegy is not a romantic poem ; its moralizing is conventional and pleased eighteenth century readers for that very

reason. Scores of poems were written at that time in which the thought was neither above nor below that of the Elegy and these poems have nearly perished. What has kept Gray's contribution to the churchyard school alive and popular through all changes in taste, is its absolute perfection of language. There are few poems in English literature that express the sentiment of the author with such felicity and beauty. This ensures its immortality; and it is this fact, that deservedly gives it the first place in Gray's literary productions."

WORD-MEANINGS AND PARAPHRASE

Stanzas 1-3 : The Poet visits the Churchyard in the evening.

St. 1. Curfew—the name of the evening bell, which used to be rung at about 8 o'clock as a signal for putting out fires—a custom introduced into England by William, the Conqueror. Here it means simply the evening bell in the church. Tolls—used for the ringing of church bells. Knell—the bell rung at a funeral. Day is spoken of as dying and the curfew is represented as the funeral bell rung in honour of day's death. Here the departing day is compared to a dying man. Parting—dying. Lowing—the sound made by cows. Herd—cattle. Wind—walk in a zigzag manner. Lea—meadow. Ploughman—farmer. Plods—walks heavily. Weary way—an instance of Transferred Epithet. It is not the way that was weary; it was the ploughman. The world—all the surrounding country. As if the whole hemisphere is plunged in darkness on the setting of the sun. And to me—solitude that follows is in harmony with me. (Gray speaks of the ploughman, but in fact it is a personal remark, which conveys that darkness is pleasing to the poet.) An autobiographical touch is perhaps given to it when Gray mourns the death of his aunt alone in the churchyard.

Paraphrase—The day is done. The evening has approached. The cattle are returning home from the meadows and they move slowly in a zigzag line. The farmer who has been hard at work during the day, is walking heavily towards his home and as he walks, darkness falls over the surrounding country, followed by solitude very harmonious to the heart of the farmer (the poet's heart).

St. 2. Fades . . . on the sight—becomes dim and indistinct

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 to view. **Glimmering**—faintly dim in the twilight. **Landscape**—scenery. **All the air**—the whole atmosphere. **Solemn stillness**—silence such as disposes the mind to meditation and suggests serious thoughts. **Holds**—fills. **Save**—except. **Where**—in those spots where. **Beetle**—a kind of dark coloured insect, which makes a humming noise. **Wheels**—makes circles in the air. **Droning**—humming. **And**—there were exceptions to the general silence—(a) the humming of the beetle, and (b) the tinkling of sheep bells. **Drowsy tinklings**—the sound of bells heard at irregular intervals indicating that the sheep, round whose neck the bell is tied, is falling asleep. **Lull**—put to silence. **Folds**—sheep-folds; enclosures where the sheep are kept at night.

Paraphrase—The surrounding scene begins to grow dim and indistinct to view in the evening twilight, and everything around is perfectly calm and quiet, except for a few sounds, such as, (1) the humming of the beetle, as it makes circles in the air, (2) the sound of the bell tied to the neck of the bell-wether, ringing at irregular intervals and in a dull monotonous manner away in a far off sheep-fold.

St. 3. Save—except. **Yonder**—the hooting of the owl is heard from amid some old ruined tower covered with ivy. The poet represents himself here as actually seeing the ivy-mantled tower. **Ivy-mantled**—covered with a creeping plant that grows on old ruins. **Mantle** means a cloak or a robe. **Ivy** is compared to a cloak in which the tower is dressed. **Moping**—fond of gloom and solitude, in a depressed spiritless state. **To the moon complain**—the complaint is one of trespass and it is made to the moon, because she is the queen of night. The owl generally hoots most on moonlit nights. It is the fashion with poets to associate the owl and the moon in various ways. In classical poetry the moon is conceived as the lover of the owl. **Of**—against. **Such as**—passers-by. **Secret bower**—hidden nest. **Molest**—disturb. **Solitary reign**—because all is lonely. The tower is conceived as a kingdom in the undisputed possession of the owl. "In this picture we have a suggestion of a deeper shade of growing nightfall than in the preceding one."—(Tovey).

Paraphrase—The only other sound that breaks the deep silence is the hooting of the owl from the top of the neighbouring church steeple overgrown with ivy, where the owl has

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 her nest. The owl is spoken of as the queen of solitude making a complaint to the moon against those passers-by who, by walking near her concealed nest, break in upon her privacy or encroach upon her dominion. This means that the owl hoots whenever she is scared by footsteps of any intruder, who may happen to disturb her.

Stanzas 4-7 : Daily life of the buried rustics in their lifetime.

St. 4. Rugged—rough. It was because of their age ; roughbarked. **Elm**—a kind of English tree having large branches. **Yew**—a kind of evergreen tree often seen in churchyards. **Heaves**—rises. **Turf**—grass. **Mould'ring**—crumbling away, being gradually levelled with the ground. This was because the graves belonged to the poor persons and they were not made of stones. **Heap**—mound. **Each**—each of the rude forefathers of the hamlet, in the next line. **Narrow cell**—grave contrasted with large burial spaces of the rich. **For ever laid**—dead ; 'sleeping the sleep that knows no walking.' **Sleep**—lie buried.

Paraphrase—In this churchyard are buried the simple and ignorant ancestors of the present generation living in the village. They lie buried, under the shade of that cluster of rough elm trees and that yew tree which I see over there, their graves being marked by mounds of earth, slowly crumbling away.

N.B.—Gray speaks of the poor throughout the poem, the poor who live in villages as contrasted with the rich, the people who live in cities and who were buried inside the church with stately monuments over their tombs.

St. 5. Breezy call—call of the breeze. **Incense-breathing**—sending forth fragrant smells, viz., of flowers. Incense is a kind of fragrant substance which is burnt at the time of worship. **Swallow**—a migratory bird. **Twitt'ring**—singing. **Straw-built shed**—the thatched verandah in front of their huts. **The cock's shrill clarion**—the loud crowing of the cock. **Echoing horn**—the sound of the huntsman's bugle that starts echoes in the early morning which is the usual time of hunting. **Rouse them**—waken them from sleep. **Their lowly bed**—the humble bed.

ing, nor the chirping of swallows from their nests in the thatched roofs of cottages, nor the crowing of the cock, nor the sound of the huntsman's bugle that starts echoes will, ever again, waken them from sleep, as they used to do when they were alive.

St. 6. Hearth—fireplace. **Shall**—the use of 'shall' with the third person here suggests the decree of fate—what is destined to happen. **Ply**—perform. **Evening care**—the duties of the evening. (The meaning is that their wives will no more have the supper ready for them). **Lisp**—greet, with broken words of welcome. **Their sire's return**—their father returning home. **Climb his knees**—crawl up his legs to be lifted up by him in his arms and kissed. **The envied kiss**—their father's kiss which each one jealously tried to receive first.

Paraphrase—Their death has cut them off from the happiness of home. Their wife will no more light a cheerful fire to welcome them in the evening when they returned home at the end of the day's work ; she will no more have the supper ready against their arrival ; their children will no more run forward to greet them in their childish accents on their return home after the day's work ; nor will the children any more attempt to clamber on his knee and receive their kiss in the matter of which they were very jealous of one another.

St. 7. Harvest—ripe corn standing in the field. **To**—at the stroke of. **Did.....yield**—gave way. (The meaning of this line is that these village peasants had reaped the crop of many seasons and year after year they cut the ripe crop. **Furrow**—the act of furrowing or ploughing. **Stubborn**—hard (adjective of 'soil' yielding to the plough driven with great labour). **Glebe**—soil. **How**—very. **Jocund**—merrily (it is an adjective but is used as adverb here). **Team**—team of oxen. **Afield**—on the field. **How**—how quickly and easily. **Bowed** fell down. In this word, there is a tacit metaphor comparing the forest trees to soldiers who are cut down in battle. **Woods**—trees of the forest. **Beneath**—under the force of. **Sturdy stroke**—vigorous blow.

Paraphrase—Year after year did these village-peasants reap their crops in the proper season and plough the farm lands with great labour. Very cheerfully indeed did they drive their team of oxen or horses as they worked through the field

and very ^{Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu} ~~generously~~ did they hew down the forest trees with their axes.

Stanzas 8-11. Uselessness of wealth and power in the face of death.

St. 8. Ambition—personification here—for ‘ambitious men’. (Men who aspire for power and fame). **Mock**—laugh at. **Their**—of these peasants. **Useful toil**—labour of peasants which is beneficial to mankind. **Homely joys**—simple pleasures of the poor. (There is a contrast with the sinful and costly luxuries of the rich). **Destiny obscure**—humble lot. They live and die unknown and unseen. **Grandeur**—again personification for ‘great and high-born persons’. **With a disdainful smile**—with an expression of contempt. **Short**—brief. **Simple**—uneventful. **Annals**—life history.

Paraphrase—Men who aspire for power and fame should ‘not dispise the humble manual labour of these poor peasants, which is so useful to mankind as supplying them with the bread on which they live, nor should they scorn the simple and innocent pleasure enjoyed by these poor people in the midst of their family, nor their low lot of living and dying unknown to fame. Great and high-born people should not listen to the history of these peasants’ lives with feelings of contempt, merely because their life has been so uneventful and bare.

St. 9. The boast of heraldry—the pride and pretension of noble descent. (In ancient times the nobility used to show their descent by emblazoning their heraldic devices on their coat of arms and shields. Members of noble families are very proud of their coat-of-arms, especially when this is very old). **The pomp of power**—the magnificence that attends a man in power or authority. **All**—every advantage. **E’er**—the word ‘ever’ here suggests that beauty and wealth sometimes confer exceptional advantages. And, these exceptional advantages are enjoyed by a few. **Th’inevitable hour**—death, which must come one day. **The paths of glory**—the plural ‘paths’ suggests that there are many ways of gaining honour and distinction and achieving distinguished careers. **Lead but to the grave**—end in death alone.

Paraphrase—Death puts an end to the pride of noble descent, the splendour and magnificence that attends powerful

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 men, the importance, influence and every other advantage afforded by beauty and richness in the case of any individual at any time—all kinds of glorious careers end in death alone. The simple meaning, in other words, is that man must die some day, however noble his decent may be, however splendidly he may live, however influential he may be and however glorious his career may have been.

St. 10. You—it is an address to those, whom the poet cautioned in the 8th stanza. **Ye proud**—you great people of the earth. **Impute to these the fault**—blame these poor peasants. (In fact, they are not to be blamed if they could not distinguish themselves in the world, so as to deserve grand monuments inside the church raised by their friends and relatives). **Memory**—their admirers, (personification here). **Trophies**—monuments raised over the graves of distinguished persons to commemorate their great deeds. **Raise**—erect. **Aisle**—the side or wing of a church. **Fretted**—ornamented. **Vault**—arched roof of the church. **Long-drawn aisle and fretted vault**—seems to suggest the Gothic style of architecture. **Pealing anthem**—sacred hymn loudly sung. **Swells**—gives fulness to. **The note of praise**—songs sung in praise of God.

Paraphrase—He addresses the great people of the earth and requests them not to blame the peasants if their relations and friends have not erected monuments in their honour in the choir of the church because it is no fault of theirs that they did not distinguish themselves in life so as to deserve such monuments.

N.B.—The last two lines of this stanza are poetic. They are very much similar to Tennyson's lines—

“Where the kneeling hamlet drains
 The chalice of the grapes of God.” —*In Memoriam*.

St. 11. **Storied urn**—a monument telling the story of the departed. An urn is a vessel for holding the ashes of the dead after cremation and a representation of an urn is sometimes placed on tombstones. The use of urn is common in India. It was also in use in Greece and Rome. **Animated bust**—life-like statue. **Its mansion**—the dwelling place of the body. **Call**—connect it with ‘back’—‘call back’ meaning ‘restore’. **Fleeting**—short-lived. **Honours voice**—speeches in the honour of

the dead ~~and in Memorials College Of Education Bantala, Jam~~ The silent dust—the dead lying in the graves. Flattery—words of flattery. Soothe—please. The dull cold ear of Death—the ears of the dead men.

Paraphrase—It is good that the village peasants have no monuments raised over their graves, for neither monuments with biographical inscriptions engraved thereon, nor lifelike statues can bring the dead back to life. No laudatory speeches in their honour, no glowing tributes to their memory can recall the dead to life, nor can words of flattery please them, as they please the living.

Stanzas 12-19 : Their humble lot prevented the development of their talents and crimes.

St. 12. This neglected spot—this country churchyard which nobody cares to visit, because it contains only the graves of the poor. Laid—is buried. Heart—man. Pregnant with celestial fire—divinely inspired. Cowper also uses this very expression in *Boadicea*—

“Such the bard’s prophetic words
Pregnant with celestial fire.”

Rod of empire—the emblem of sovereignty. Might have—could have, if they had the opportunity. Sway’d—wielded. Waked—played upon. A short form of ‘wakened’. The living lyre—the lyre capable of producing music like that of a living person. (The lyre is a kind of musical instrument like the harp anciently used, as an accompaniment to poetry. Hence, ‘waking the lyre’ here represents writing of poetry. It can even mean natural musical talent).

Paraphrase—It is quite possible that this country churchyard, which no body cares to visit, contains the graves of men who, when they lived, were divinely inspired by lofty thoughts and feelings, or of men who could have reigned as kings, or distinguished themselves as great poets or musicians, if they had the opportunity.

St. 13. But—but they could not do so because. Knowledge—knowledge is personified and spoken of as possessing a bulky volume in which are recorded the thoughts and deeds of all ages. This is because the chief source of knowledge is books. To their eyes—before them so that they could read it.

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Ample page—large book. **Rich with the spoils of time**—containing all the valuable records of past ages. **Unroll**—open. **Chill**—cold. **Penury**—poverty ; destitution. **Repress'd**—put down. **Noble**—of a high order. **Rage**—used here in a double sense—ambition and ardent desires ; generous feelings. **Froze the genial current of the soul**—the soul is here spoken of as a stream which is at once cheering and fertilising. The comparison suggests the fervour and creative power of genius. The effect of the freezing of a river is that it does not flow ; the effect of poverty on the peasants was that their genius remained undeveloped and inactive.

Paraphrase—The reason why these poor peasants could never achieve fame as rulers or as poets or musicians was that they never had the opportunity of exercising their talents. They were ignorant and poor and hence their genius remained undeveloped and inactive for ever. So, they could not distinguish themselves as statesmen or as warriors or as poets.

St. 14. Full many—a great many **Gem**—pearl ; jewel. **Of purest ray serene**—of the most unspotted lustre ; of flawless beauty. (The order of these words has been borrowed from Milton). **Dark**—the dark caves that lie at the bottom of the sea. **Unfathom'd**—that has not been measured. **Caves of ocean**—hollows in the bed of the sea. **Bear**—have ; contain. **Is born**—comes into being. **Blush**—refers to the glowing colour of the flowers. **Unseen**—unobserved. **Waste its sweetness**—throw away its perfume in an unfrequented place where there is no one to enjoy its fragrance.

Paraphrase—There are many pearls of perfect beauty and lustre lying in the hollows in the bed of the sea, where nobody can reach them. There are also many flowers that blossom in lonely forests where no one can see them and admire their beauty or enjoy their fragrance.

St. 15. Some village Hampden—John Hampden, born in London in 1594, was a celebrated patriot. In 1636, he distinguished himself by his resistance to the illegal authority of King Charles I. In the Civil War, he took up arms against the King. 'Hampden', though a proper noun, has been used as a common noun here. This phrase means, some villager who had the spirit to resist tyranny as boldly as Hampden. **With dauntless breast**—boldly ; fearlessly. **The little tyrant of his fields**—a petty village landlord is surely 'little' when compared with the mighty tyrant Charles I, whom Hampden op-

posed. ~~With~~ ^{at} ~~Mandora~~ ^{College Of Education Bantala} ~~College~~ ^{Jammu} ~~Some~~ ^{Some} ~~mute~~ ^{inglorious}
Milton—reference is to Milton, who is the greatest epic poet of England. But this proper noun has been used as common noun, meaning that many Miltons may be there who were silent and never achieved fame as a poet, as Milton did. 'Inglorious' means not renowned. **Here**—in this country. **May rest**—is probably buried. **Some Cromwell**—Oliver Cromwell, the parliamentary leader of England during the great Civil War, espoused the Puritan cause. He was appointed as the commander of the Parliamentary army, which defeated King Charles I, took him prisoner, had him executed, and set up a Republican form of Government. This proper noun is again used as a common noun meaning 'some villager who had the military genius of Cromwell'. **Guiltless of his country's blood**—some one who, unlike Cromwell, was free from the sin of having caused the death of large numbers of his countrymen, suggested against Cromwell here, alludes to the slaughter of the Civil War. The prejudice against Cromwell was extremely strong throughout the eighteenth century, even amongst the most liberal-minded. His wise statesmanship, his unceasing earnestness, his high-minded purpose were not yet seen. Gray, therefore, praises Hampden more than Cromwell.

N.B.—In the first draft of the poem Gray had Cato, Cicero and Caesar for Hampden, Milton and Cromwell. These three Romans were associated with one another in connection with the conspiracy of Catiline and hence they suggested one another. The change from Roman characters to well-known personages of his own country was a very happy change, as it has added to the vividness of the poem, and fixed its nationality, which had otherwise been destroyed by its translation into many languages.

Paraphrase—Just as there are gems and flowers unseen and unheard of, so it is probable that in this churchyard is buried some village farmer who had the spirit to resist the tyranny of some petty landlord as boldly as Hampden opposed King Charles I, by refusing to pay ship-money, or perhaps, here lies buried some villager who had the genius of a great poet like Milton, but who, from want of opportunity, wrote no poems and so remained obscure, or again, some villager, who had great military genius like Cromwell, but who, unlike Cromwell, was free from the sin of having caused the death of large numbers of his countrymen in civil wars.

St. 16. Applause—praise. **Senates**—a proper noun used as a common noun meaning political assemblies or parliaments. The senate was the greatest political assembly of Rome. **Command**—win; gain. (This line from 'Applause' to 'command' is connected with the next stanza. The prose order will be "Their lot forbade (them) to command the applause of listening to Senates, to despise the threats of pain and ruin, to scatter etc.) The meaning of the line is: "They never became famous political orators." **Threats of pain and ruin**—fears of torture, death, confiscation or banishment. **To despise**—to scorn. (To give instances of men, who were uninfluenced by the fear of pain or ruin, may be quoted, Sir Thomas Moore, who died a martyr to his religious beliefs, Sidney and Lord William Russell). The meaning of the line is: "They never became heroes or martyrs." **Scatter**—spread. **Plenty**—abundance. **Smiling**—happy. Again the meaning of the line is: "Their obscure lot prevented them from spreading prosperity and happiness through their country. Gray was possibly thinking of Walpole's long and peaceful administration which ended in 1742, the very year when the Elegy was begun. **Read their history in a nation's eyes**—conclude from the happy looks of a people that their history has been a happy one and their services have been appreciated.

Paraphrase—Their obscure position in life prevented them from becoming great political orators, whose speeches the national assemblies of their country listened to with admiration. Likewise, they never became heroes or martyrs who, in their devotion to duty or to truth, were uninfluenced by fear of death or torture, confiscation or banishment. For the same reason, they never became great administrators, who by their benevolent measures, conferred peace and prosperity on their country and made their countrymen look happy and contented.

St. 17. Their lot forbad—their fortune denied. **Circumscribed**—limited. **Their growing virtues**—the growth of their virtues. **Crimes**—vices. **Confined**—limited; narrowed. **Forbade to wade**—prevented them from wading. **Wade through slaughter to a throne**—walk across pools of human blood shed by themselves in their attempt to seize the crown.. An exaggerated metaphor to denote the seizure of power by a tyrant by causing a terrible massacre. **Shut the gates of mercy**—not

allowing any one to receive mercy, The meaning is that their obscure lot saved them from becoming merciless tyrants.

Paraphrase—Their humble life, though it allowed no opportunity for the development of their noble qualities, did nevertheless save them from many a wicked deed, of which they would otherwise have been guilty. It likewise saved them from committing bloodshed such as is sometimes resorted to by an ambitious man to usurp a kingdom. It saved them also from becoming merciless tyrants.

St. 18. Struggling pangs—painful efforts to escape. **Conscious truth**—the truth which they know and feel to be true. **Hide**—suppress. **Quench**—put out; prevent from appearing. **Blushes of ingenuous shame**—the reddening of the face which the natural feeling of shame causes. **To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame**—this line by Gray may be a borrowing from Shakespeare's line in *Winter's Tale*—

“Come quench your blushes, and present yourself.”

Heap—pile up. **Shrine of Luxury and Pride**—the temple where luxury and pride are worshiped, that is, the houses of the rich and the great. **Incense**—literally it means, ‘fragrant spices burnt in temples at the time of worship’: but here it means—verses composed in praise of the rich and great and offered to them ostensibly as a token of reverence but really by way of flattery. Writing odes in honour of great men in order to win their favour or patronage was a common mode of flattery, practised by poets in Gray's time. **Kindled**—inspired. **Muse's flame**—poetic genius which is represented as a fire. The Muses were goddesses who presided over poetry and the fine arts.

Paraphrase—To understand its meaning better, we should supply ‘Their lot forbade them’ before this stanza. Therefore the paraphrasing will be—Their lot forbade them to hide the struggling pangs of conscious truth or honesty, as also from becoming courtly and venal poets. They never tried wilfully to misrepresent truth by stifling free inquiry and the evidence of truth; they never attempted to suppress the blush that is caused by the natural feeling of shame; they never addressed flattering poems to the rich and great in the hope of being rewarded by them.

St. 19. Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife.....
 to stray—

The prose order is—they being far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife, their sober wishes never learnt to stray.

Madding crowd—people who devote themselves frantically to worldly pursuits and who are mad after wealth and position. **Ignoble strife**—means competition. **Sober wishes**—moderate desire. They never had inordinate desires of any kind. **Never learn'd to stray**—never went beyond their proper limits. 'To stray' means 'to wander' from the path of virtue. **Cool sequester'd vale of life**—their quiet, retired life is compared to a cool (refreshing) lonely valley, because, just as a valley is free from the storms that rage on the tops of mountains, so was their life free from the disturbances that surround a great man engaged in important public affairs. **Sequester'd**—retired. **Vale**—valley. **Kept.....their way**—this involves the metaphor of life being compared to a journey. Stript of metaphor, therefore, the phrase means 'lived one'. **Tenor**—uniform course. **Way**—life.

Paraprase—Living as they did aloof from the mean competition and jealousies of people who devote themselves frantically to worldly pursuits, their desires were always moderate and set within proper limits, they led a quiet, retired, humble life to the end of their days.

Stanzas. 20 23 : Rude inscriptions on their tombs show they deserve to be remembered.

St. 20. Yet—it may be connected with stanza 10 for a clearer meaning. **E'en**—this word suggests that the bones of poor people are not worth protection from insults. **These bones**—the remains of these poor peasants. **Insult**—desecration. **To protect**—the prose order is 'Yet to protect even these bones. **Frail**—perishable. **Memorial**—monument. **Still**—in each case. **Erected nigh**—raised near their homes. **Uncouth rhymes**—rude verses. This is opposed to the elegant epitaphs engraved on the tombs of the great. **Shapeless sculpture**—some kind of rudely constructed statue. This is opposed to the highly artistic statues placed over the tombs of the great. 'Sculpture', though abstract, is here used as concrete noun, meaning the art of making statues used for the statues themselves. **Deck'd—adorned.** Adorned has a special meaning

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here. It means 'marked with' or 'characterised by'. **Implores**—solicits. **Passing—brief**. **Tribute**—something paid to honour the memory of the dead. **Sigh**—a sigh is an expression of sorrow or sympathy.

Paraphrase—Though they have no stately tombs, and though their lives were most obscure, there is nevertheless some kind of humble monument raised over their tombs in the neighbourhood of their homes. Though made of perishable material, and bearing only a rude inscription and a rude effigy, such a monument is intended to evoke a brief feeling of sympathy from the passer-by.

St. 21. **Their years**—the date of their birth and the date of their death. It can even be interpreted as 'their age at the time of death'. **Spelt by th' unletter'd Muse**—composed by some uneducated versifier.

N. B.—Dr. Bradshaw has offered the following note to this line :

"Gray had probably in mind that under the yew tree, there is a tombstone with several words wrongly spelt and some letters ill-formed, and that even in the inscription which he composed for his aunt's tomb the word 'resurrection' is spelt incorrectly by the unlettered stone-cutter."

The place of fame and elegy supply—are a substitute for the emblazoned epitaphs inscribed on the tombs of the great. The nominatives to 'supply' are 'name' and 'years', and the object 'place'. **Holy text**—passage from the Bible. **She**—the goddess of poetry. **Around**—all about the monument. **Strews**—scatters. **The rustic moralist**—the village peasant who desires to live a life of virtue and purity. **To die**—how to die like a pious man.

Paraphrase—Instead of elaborate epitaphs, such as, are engraved on the tombs of the great, the tombs of these poor peasants have only a simple inscription giving their names and their ages at the time of death, with a number of passages from the Bible rudely engraved all about the monument. The inscription is obviously composed by some uneducated versifier, for several words are incorrectly spelt, and the passages from the Bible selected for the inscription are such as serve to teach the village peasants how to die like a pious Christian.

St. 22. **Who**—the word puts a rhetorical question—the answer to which is none. **Dumb forgetfulness**—total oblivion ;

vanishing from memory. A **prey**—a destined prey; doomed to be a victim. This **pieasing anxious being**—there is an anti-thesis between pleasing and anxious. It means this life which is full of joys and also cares. **E'er**—at any time. **Resign'd**—surrendered. **Left**—quitted. The warm **precints of the cheerful day**—life is spoken of as having warm precints because everything surrounding life or associated with life is so pleasant and enjoyable in constrast with the cold, narrow grave, which is an object of terror. **Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day**—passed beyond the farthest boundaries of life, i. e., died. **Nor cast**—did not cast. **One longing, ling'ring look**—a wistful look continuing to dwell on some object of fond desire, a look of eager desire unwilling to withdraw itself from some beloved object. **Behind**—backward, i. e., towards life as he leaves it.

Paraphrase—The reason why there are monuments to mark the graves of even these poor people is that though all men are destined to be forgotten, every one craves to be remembered after death. No one departs from life, its joys and cares without a wistful fond gaze on objects of love he is leaving after him.

St. 23. Some **fond breast**—some loving person. '**Breast**' here means 'support'. The **parting soul**—a dying person. **Relies**—depends for support. **Pious drops**—tears of sympathy. The **closing eye**—a dying person. **Requires**—needs for comfort. It gives some comfort to a dying person to see his friends and relations weeping for him. **E'en from the tomb**—even after a person is dead and buried. The **voice of Nature**—the natural craving for loving remembrance; the instinctive desire to be remembered after death. **In our Ashes**—when all is dust and ashes. **Live**—are perpetuated. Their **wonted fires**—the strong desire for remembrance which they always habitually entertained.

N. B.—The four expressions 'parting soul', 'closing eye', 'the tomb' and 'ashes' form a climax. The first phrase announces the approach of death, the second its actual arrival, the third the time immediately after death, and the fourth, a long time after death, when the body has become dust and ashes in the grave.

Paraphrase—When dying, a person depends, for support, on some loving friends and needs the sympathy and sorrow of

those who died in the College Of Education-Bantalab Jammu. Even after one is dead and buried, the same natural craving for loving remembrance continues. Nay, long after death, when the body has become dust and ashes in the grave, the passion for loving remembrance which they habitually entertained finds strong expression in inscription on their tombs.

Stanzas 24-29 : A village rustic describes the habits of the poet himself.

St. 24. For thee—as regards thyself. The poet is referring to himself here. Mindful of th' unhonour'd dead—anxious to show some marks of recognition to the poor lying buried in this country churchyard; caring to show some consideration for the rude forefathers of the hamlet, who are buried in this country churchyard. Dost—does. It is connected with 'relate'. Their artless tale—story of their simple life. Relate—tell. Chance—by chance. By lonely contemplation led—brought hither by a desire to indulge in solitary meditation. Kindred spirit—kind friend. Inquire thy fate—ask what has become of thee.

Paraphrase—In this stanza, the poet himself occupies the central figure and keeps it until the end of the poem. In his anxiety to show some mark of recognition to the poor lying buried in the country churchyard he has celebrated these humble people in this poem. If some kind friend, who happens to visit this place, should spend a little time in quiet thought and should ask himself what shall become of him?

St. 25. Haply—perhaps. Hoary-headed—aged. Swain—peasant. (The kind inquirer is supposed to ask some old peasant about the fate of Gray and stanzas 25-29 are supposed to contain the peasant's reply). At the peep of dawn—in the early morning. Brushing.....the dews away—sweeping the dew-drops from the grass on which they had gathered. To meet the sun upon the upland lawn—in order to reach the high lawn just at sunrise.

Paraphrase—Perhaps some old peasant may reply in answer to the enquiry : "We have often seen him in the early morning sweeping away the dewdrops from the grass as he walked swiftly to reach the high lawn before sunrise.

St. 26. There—on that upland lawn. At the foot of—under. Nodding—waving in the wind. Deen—a kind of forest

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tree with smooth bark and glossy leaves. **Wreathes**—twines. **Fantastic**—forming strange shapes ; making themselves into curious figures. **So high**—much above the surface of the ground. **His listless.....would he stretch**—the word 'would' indicates a habitual course of action. He was in the habit of lying stretched at full length in an idle manner. **Pore**—gaze on. **Brook**—rivulet. **Babbles**—flows with a pleasant murmuring sound. **By**—close to the above tree.

Paraphrase—At noon he was in the habit of lying idly down at full length under that beech tree which you see is waving in the wind and which has its roots strangely twisted together above the surface of the ground. In this attitude, he was in the habit of gazing on the rivulet which flows near at hand.

St. 27. Hard by—close to. **Yon wood**—yonder bushes. **Now**—sometimes. **As in scorn**—as if inwardly felt disgust at something. His smile did not indicate pleasure but contempt. **Mutt'ring**—speaking indistinctly. **Wayward fancies**—random thoughts. **Would rove**—would roam about hither and thither. **Now**—sometimes again. **Drooping**—dejected. **Woeful wan**—sad and pale. **Like one forlorn**—like a man in a pitiful condition. **Crazed with care**—like one who is rendered desperate by anxieties. **Cross'd**—frustrated ; disappointed. **Hopeless love**—love which has no chance of leading to a union with the beloved.

Paraphrase—He was in the habit of wandering about in the neighbourhood of yonder bushes. He would sometimes speak out his random thoughts indistinctly, sometimes smile a contemptuous smile, sometimes look dejected, sad, and pale like a man in a pitiful condition, or like one made desperate by anxieties or like a lover who has no hope of being united with his beloved.

St. 28. Morn—morning. **Miss'd him**—did not find him. **The custom'd hill**—The hill where I always used to see him. **Along the heath**—in the wood. (Heath is a piece of ground covered with coarse grass). **His favourite tree**—the beech tree under which he was fond of lying. **Another came**—the next morning. **Nor yet**—nor even. **Beside**—on the bank of. **Rill**—rivulet.

Paraphrase—One morning I did not find him on the hill where I always used to see him. He was not there, nor was he in the woods, nor under his favourite beech tree. The next morning too I did not find him there nor on the banks of the brook, nor on the lawn, nor in the wood.

St. 29. The next—the next day. With dirges due—accompanied by people singing funeral songs in the customary style. A dirge is a song of mourning. In sad array—in a mournful procession. Slow—slowly. The church-way path—the path leading (from the main road) to the church. Him—his dead body. Borne—carried. Approach—come nearer and see his grave. (This is addressed by the old peasant to the kind friends who make enquiries about Gray). For thou canst read—I believe you are a literate man.

N. B.—In regard to this belief that the enquirer is an accomplished fellow, the commentators have thought differently. Hales is of opinion that Gray has introduced these words because reading was not such a very common accomplishment then. Mr. Tovey thinks that these words are added because the hoary-headed swain himself could not read, he presumes that the enquirer is more accomplished. Dr. Bradshaw regards the clause as a poetical turn, a repetition that gives vividness to the speech of the old peasant and well brought in as he had not hitherto personally addressed the enquirer.

Lay—song or ballad. Graved—carved ; cut. Stone—tombstone. Thorn—Hawthorn tree.

Paraphrase—“Next morning I saw his dead body carried slowly along the path leading to the churchyard followed by the people singing funeral songs in the customary style. Come nearer, and see his grave for yourself, and read the inscription on the tombstone, for I believe you are a literate man.”

N. B.—The next three stanzas (30, 31 & 32) are the *Epitaph* on Gray's tomb. The inscription first enumerates the qualities of his character and then concludes to say that all his merits as well as demerits rest in the hands of God. Further, the Epitaph represents Gray as a young man, poor and obscure, though somewhat educated, of a melancholy disposition, sympathetic and sincere.

St. 30. Epitaph—an inscription on a tomb. Here at this spot. Rests his head—is buried. Lap of Earth—the earth is

often called 'Mother Earth', because it sustains human life. He is lying buried here as if it is resting in his mother's arms. A Youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown—a young man, poor and obscure. Fair—beautiful. Science—is personified so that it almost stands for the 'Goddess of knowledge'. Frowned not—looked favourably upon. It is a sort of double negative for 'smiled'. On his humble birth—on him in spite of his humble birth. Melancholy marked him for her own—melancholy or sadness (personified here) set her mark on him to show that he belonged to her. It means that he was a man of a naturally morose disposition. (This was true of Gray). Own—own child.

St. 31. Bounty—generosity. Soul—character. Sincere—unaffected. Heaven—God. Recompense—reward. As largely—as large as his generosity. Mis'ry—the wretched. All he had, a tear—everything which he possessed, viz., a tear of sympathy. Gained from Heaven—received from God as the reward of his sympathy. 'T was all he wished—that was only desire. (His wish in life was not to grow wealthy or famous, but to get a true friend, and this true friend he did get. Probably, this true friend was God).

St. 32. No further—in greater detail. Seek—try. Disclose—enumerate. Draw—take out. Frailties—defects. Their dread abode—the awful place where they now rest (that is, the bosom of God). There—on the bosom of God. They—his merits. Alike—equally with the frailties. In trembling hope—in hope mixed with fear. Repose—rest.

Paraphrase—(Stanzas 30, 31 & 32). In this grave lies a young man who was poor and obscure but fairly educated and born with a morose disposition. He was very generous and sincere because he gave away to the wretched all he had, and all he had was sympathy. He received from God a reward as great as generosity had been large, namely, a true friend and that was the only wish of his life. It is no use enumerating his good qualities and defects, for both are in the hands of God who may approve or disapprove of them as he pleases.

II. GRAY'S ODES

The ode is a form of lyrical verse expressing an emotion which is too long to be held within the limits of the pure lyric. Its subject is dignified, often majestic. Its style is grand. Its atmosphere is solemn. Its emotion is less personal and more reflective or meditative than that of the lyric. It has a stronger intellectual content. And, through all the changing phases of the emotion, there is a progressive development of the thought.

Odes are of two kinds—regular and irregular. The regular odes may further be divided into two classes. The first of these is the Pindaric Ode, modelled on the form practised by the Greek poet, Pindar, and consisting of a systematic arrangement of three types of stanzas, the strophe, antistrophe and epode. The second class of regular ode consists of a succession of stanzas identical in length and rhyme scheme. An example of the second type is Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale'—although the second stanza of this Ode differs from the rest in having four rhymes instead of five.

The irregular Ode is written in stanzas, whose length, line-length, and rhyme-scheme vary according to the shifting emotion or thought of the poem. Dryden's "Song for St. Cecilia's Day" and "Alexander's Feast" are examples of this, an unusual feature of the latter is that it is set in the form of a narrative.

The regular Odes are written after the pattern of Pindar. Pindar's Odes were based on a unit composed of three metrical sections called strophe, antistrophe and epode. All these names have been derived from the Greek theatre in which the strophe was sung along with chorus when it moved from left to the right. The occasion for singing 'Epode' was during the period when chorus was stationary. The strophe and the antistrophe were constituted of twelve lines while the epode contained seventeen lines and each line varied in size and length, some being of eight, some of ten and some of even twelve syllables.

The Pindaric Odes were introduced in English literature

by Ben Jonson. Congreve and Gray introduced a great variety. Dryden and Cowley later wrote them. Later on Arnold and Swinburne also imitated them. The division of strophe, antistrophe and epode was of no significance to the English writers, because they wrote odes for readers and not for the theatre, and the symmetrical manner for reproduction was no delight for the reader.

Odes of Gray compared with those of Milton, Dryden, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats :

The distinction between the odes of Milton and those of Gray lies in the distinction between the puritan spirit and the classical spirit. There is a remarkable unity in the style and spirit of Milton's poetry. His Ode "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity", one of the poems of his Cambridge days has a command of gorgeous imagery, majesty of style and rolling music in unison. Nevertheless, the ode is the work of a youth—of such a youth as Milton was. "For the gold, myrrh and frankincense of the star-led wizards, he pours out at the feet of the infant God an unintermitted shower of grace and splendour of fantastic concept and sublime imagination, drawn incongruously from the classical, mediaeval and Renaissance worlds—the whole of it, for all its inequality, unmistakably exhibiting the hand of master." What is the depth of the religious feeling in the poem? In recent years, Milton has been badly criticized for his claim of liberty and Christian virtue. Milton's thirst for righteousness today seems to be inseparable from his personal arrogance. In his philosophy, there is more of the Greek stoic than the Christian. Milton's religious poetry is different from the religious poetry of some of his own contemporaries. It lacks that spirit of serenity, that mystical exaltation in which the soul of man is caught up into union with its Maker, which we find in the poetry of his contemporaries. But a vein of genuine religious tenderness does run through this work of Milton's youth.

With the opening of the era known in political history as the Restoration, there came a great change in the spirit of English poetry. Social life gathered round the city and the court. And, literature reflected the tone of that society in its regularity of form, its moderation of sentiment, its smoothness and finish of diction. Inspiration, ecstasy, emotion came under

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suspicion. Shakespeare had plumbed the depth of the human heart, Milton soared into the empyrean to express the blazing majesty of Heaven : their successors took for their field the social follies and theological disputes of the day. With the decay of imagination such literary forms as the epic, tragedy, and sonnet ceased to be cultivated. Lyric-writing, however, continued but it lacked the freshness of the preceding periods.

Dryden is the representative of the earlier half of this age and Pope is the leading figure of the latter. Dryden is a playwright, literary critic, satirist, lyricist, verse-translator, the master of didactic and argumentative poetry and founder of modern English prose style, and he achieved excellence in almost every one of these departments. Dryden's Odes—the "Song for St. Cecilia's Day" and "Alexander's Feast" written in the final period of his life, are his two most popularly known poems. They are an illustration of Dryden's brilliant qualities. The former is written in all the heat of his recent conversion to Roman Catholicism. It is purer in form, more communicative in music, beauty and sweetness. The latter one is more spontaneous. There is rigidity of form in Dryden's Odes.

Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty" written on the lines of Gray's "Ode to Adversity" and the moral or didactic tone of Wordsworth has similarity with Gray in so far as Gray does honour to the benign character of adversity. Wordsworth shows the benign grace of stern law-giver of duty, but all the odes of Wordsworth are lyrical and personal whereas those of Gray are impersonal and historical. The laboured efforts of Gray to display artistic perfection in his odes is not to be found in the spontaneous odes of Wordsworth. Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" and Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" have been written on the lines of Horace, but both these poets freely used the stanza which responded to their thoughts. In Keats, like Gray, we find a fondness for using adjectives before nouns, such as, 'beaded bubbles,' 'embalmed darkness,' but the adjectives of Keats are quite apt while those of Gray like 'blue-eyed pleasures' and 'frantic passions' are typical. They speak of obscurity. The odes of these Romantics have a glow of romantic emotion and the freshness of imagination and they exhibit the inner feelings of the poets, but Gray's odes are cool in thought and are therefore in line with the didactic tradition.

(i) A DISTANT PROSPECT OF ETON COLLEGE

1

YE, distant spires, ye antique towers
That crown the watery glade,
Where grateful Science still adores
Her Henry's holy shade ;
And ye, that from the stately brow
Of Windsor's heights th' expanse below
Of grove, of lawn, of mead survey,
Whose turf, whose shade, whose flowers among
Wanders the hoary Thames along
His silver-winding way :

2

Ah happy hills ! ah pleasing shade !
Ah fields beloved in vain !
Where once my careless childhood strayed,
A stranger yet to pain !
I feel the gales that from ye blow
A momentary bliss bestow,
As waving fresh their gladsome wing
My weary soul they seem to soothe,
And, redolent of joy and youth,
To breathe a second spring.

3

Say, Father Thames, for thou hast seen
Full many a sprightly race
Disporting on thy margent green
The paths of pleasure trace ;
Who foremost now delight to cleave
With pliant arm, the glassy wave ?
The captive linnet which enthrall ?
What idle progeny succeed

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 To chase the rolling circle's speed
 Or urge the flying ball ?

4

While some on earnest business bent
 Their murmuring labours ply
 'Gainst graver hours, that bring constraint
 To sweeten liberty :
 Some bold adventurers disdain
 The limits of their little reign
 And unknown regions dare descry :
 Still as they run they look behind,
 They hear a voice in every wind,
 And snatch a fearful joy.

5

Gay hope is theirs by fancy fed,
 Less pleasing when possessed ;
 The tear forgot as soon as shed,
 The sunshine of the breast :
 Theirs buxom health, of rosy hue,
 Wild wit, invention ever new,
 And lively cheer, of vigour born ;
 The thoughtless day, the easy night,
 The spirits pure, the slumbers light
 That fly th' approach of morn.

6

Alas ! regardless of their doom
 The little victims play !
 No sense have they of ills to come
 No care beyond today :
 Yet see how all around them wait
 The Ministers of human fate
 And black Misfortune's baleful train !
 Ah show them where in ambush stand
 To seize their prey, the murderous band !
 Ah, tell them they are men

7

These shall the fury Passions tear,
The vultures of the mind,
Disdainful Anger, pallid Fear,
And Shame that skulks behind,
Or pining Love shall waste their youth,
Or Jealousy with rankling tooth
That inly gnaws the secret heart,
And Envy wan, and faded Care,
Grim-visaged comfortless Despair,
And Sorrow's piercing dart.

8

Ambition this shall tempt to rise,
Then whirl the wretch from high,
To bitter Scorn a sacrifice
And grinning Infamy.
The stings of Falsehood those shall try,
And hard Unkindness' altered eye,
That mocks the tear it forced to flow ;
And keen Remorse with blood defiled,
And moody Madness laughing wild
Amid severest woe.

9

Lo, in the vale of years beneath
A griesly troop are seen,
The painful family of Death,
More hideous than their Queen :
This racks the joints, this fires the veins,
That every labouring sinew strains,
Those in the deeper vital rage :
Lo, Poverty, to fill the band,
That numbs the soul with icy hand,
And slow-consuming Age.

To each his sufferings : all are men,
 Condemned alike to groan ;
 The tender for another's pain,
 Th' unfeeling for his own.
 Yet, ah ! why should they know their fate,
 Since sorrow never comes too late,
 And happiness too swiftly flies ?
 Thought would destroy their paradise.
 No more ;—where ignorance is bliss,
 'Tis folly to be wise.

NOTES

Introduction

In the Pembroke Ms., Gray had added at the close of his copy of this poem : 'At Stroke,' August, 1742.

West had been dead only a very short time ago before it was written. And Gray's estrangement from Walpole and Ashton was still comparatively recent. It was natural enough, accordingly that he should review his school-days with a certain feeling of melancholy and disillusion. On the other hand, we must remember that the general sentiment of the poem is a commonplace of pseudo-classicism and would have been adopted by almost any versifier of the period independently of his personal experience.

"East and west from the church of Stoke-Pogis, towards Stoke-Green in one direction and towards Farnham Royal in the other, there rises a gentle acclivity, from which the ground gradually slopes southward to the Thames and which lies opposite those 'distant spires' and 'antique towers', which Gray has sung in melodious numbers".

Analysis

Gray had been craving to see a place full of reminiscences and yet too distant to have news of it—this was something which provoked him to write this ode. "The Eton Ode was inspired by the regret that the illusions of boyhood, the innocence that comes not of virtue but of inexperience, the sweetness born not of a good heart but of a good digestion, the

elation which childish spirits give and which owes nothing to anger or dissipation, that these simple qualities cannot be preserved through life."

But in regard to the present poem, if we are to make an estimate of Gray's mood at the time of its composition, we cannot but conclude that it is not so pessimistic in tone as the other ones, as is evidenced by the under-current tone of resignation.

Criticism

The poems, written during the summer of 1742, are clearly linked in thought and mood. The same theme runs through all the three—the flight of youth, the certainty of suffering and death and the inevitability of human fate. The "Eton Ode" is one of these. In it, Gray had been striving to speak of his personal sorrow and to contrast it with wider philosophic issues. He had been believing that sorrow was the inevitable lot of man. With such an attitude towards human helplessness, against inevitable adversity he developed a sense of utter loss and hopelessness. And when he knew about the death of West, all his defence of religion and philosophy crumbled away. All these three poems, therefore, are deeply marked by melancholy, a darkening of spirit.

Dr. Johnson says that this Ode shows that the "Prospect suggests nothing to Gray, which every beholder does not equally think and feel." This view is rather captious. The essential aim of such poetry is the expression of a universal experience.

Word Meanings and Paraphrase

St. 1. Eton—a town in Bucks. on the Thames, named for its low watery character. **Spires**—pointed steeples of a church, here, of the College. **Anitque**—ancient; lofty. **The watery glade**—well-watered woodland valley. **Science**—it is in its Latin sense, meaning "Learning of all kinds"; "Knowledge in general". It does not mean an anti-thesis to literary and artistic culture as is understood in the modern sense. **Henry's holy shade**—the Henry is, of course, Henry VI, who founded Eton and whose personal piety was unimpeachable. **Shade**—"spirit": "Ghost". **Adores... shade**—worships the sainted spirit

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 of King Henry. **Stately-brow**—majestic summits or tops. (It is an example of reflected metaphor). **Windsor's**—Windsor Castle was situated on a hill by the side of the river. **Expanse**—a wide space ; a wide prospect. **Mead**—meadow. **Survey**—take a general view of. **Shade**—memory. **Hoary**—ancient, a term applied to the water-god or god of streams and brooks. **Silver-winding way**—flowing in a bright irregular manner, as the river winds like a band of silver.

St. 2. Ah, fields beloved in vain—one of the nearest approaches of self-revelation in the whole of Gray's poetry. His love for the scenes by his boyhood had been embittered and rendered valueless by the death of West, the estrangement of Walpole and the falseness of Ashton. **Strayed**—wanders. **A stranger****pain**—who has as yet not experienced any pain. **Gales**—breezes. **Momentary**—transitory. **Weary**—tired ; exhausted. **I feel the gales.....bestow**—I feel that the breeze blowing from you, gives me a momentary happiness. **To soothe**—to refresh ; to pacify. **Redolent of**—breathing forth ; scented with. **To spring**—to bring back the joys of my youth.

St. 3. Father Thames—Johnson carped acrimoniously at this invocation to father Thames on the ground that he has no better means of knowing than the poet himself. The Thames is here conceived as a river-god. **A sprightly race**—cheerful generation of schoolboys. **Disporting.....green**—deriving pleasure by playing on thy green banks. The word 'margent' is a Miltonic form. **The paths.....trace**—follow or pursue their enjoyment as one traces a path. **Who foremost.....wave**—who eagerly take delight in swimming in your waters. **Pliant**—capable of rapid tension and relaxation. **The.....enthrall**—which of the boys go to catch the linnet and hold it a captive in their hands. **Idle progeny**—a careless generation of schoolboys. **The rolling circle**—to pursue the rolling hoop with which boys in England play. (Note. This is an example of Miltonic periphrasis). **The flying ball**—the cricket ball driven by the bat, i. e., the game of cricket. It may also refer to the football game as well. (In lines 24 to 30, the poet gives successive references to swimmers, robbers of bird's nest, trundlers of hoops and players at football).

St. 4. Earnest business bent—engaged in serious work. **Ply attend to****Murmuring labours****dissonant****which they prepare**

with a murmuring sound. Notice that the lessons themselves are spoken of as if they are making a murmuring sound. **Graver hours**—hours when they attend the school seriously. **Constraint.....liberty**—the period of seclusion that makes liberty afterwards all the more sweet to enjoy. **Adventurers**—explorers ; wanderers. **Disdain the limits**—hate the bounds within which they are confined. **Regions**—places. **Descry**—discover ; explore. **Snatch a fearful joy**—steal away a pleasure that is accompanied by fear.

St. 5. Gay hope.....possess—they possess the valuable treasure of lively hopes which are ever kept alive by fancy, but when attained, are not so pleasing as supposed by the Imagination. **Tear forgot.....breast**—they have the power of forgetting their sorrows with great rapidity, for their mind enjoys a perpetual sunshine, i. e., happiness. **Buxom**—vigorous. **Wild wit**—reckless love of joking. **Invention ever new**—perpetual freshness in inventing new tales. **Lively cheer**—cheerful frame of mind. **Vigour**—good health ; healthy spirit. **Thoughtless day**—the day free from cares and anxieties. **Slumbers**—sound sleep. **Approach**—breaking off ; coming.

St. 6. Regardless—careless. **Doom**—destiny which awaits them. **Victims**—sufferers. **Ills to come**—miseries that are in store for them. **No.....today**—nor do they take thought of the next day. **Ministers.....fate**—instruments of human destiny, i.e., those evils that afflict mankind. **Ministers**—servants. **Misfortune's.....train**—the cruel attendants that follow great misfortunes. **Show them**—point them out. (An invocation to the guardians). **Ambush**—a place of concealment. **Murderour hand**—murderous ; blood-thirsty.

St. 7. The fury Passions.....behind—some will be the prey of Passions which are most terrible Furies, while some will be torn by the vultures of anger, fear or shame. **Pining Love**—love for which they pine and die. **Jealousy**—envy. **Rankling tooth**—tooth that produces a gangrene where it bites, i e., produces poison. **Inly**—secretly ; inwardly. **Gnaws**—devours. **Wan**—pale. **Faded**—devoid of all colour of youth. **Care**—anxiety. **Grim-visaged**—having a frightful countenance ; stern-faced. **Piercing dart**—arrows that go through and through.

St. 8. Shall tempt to rise—induce to rise. **Whirl**—hurl him down. **A sacrifice**—a victim. **Grinning**—taunting. **Infamy**

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—shame. **Stings of Falsehood**—the stings of unfaithfulness of friends. **Unkindness.....eye**—the changed expression of one who was formerly very kind. **Mocks**—ridicules ; laughs at. **Keen**—sharp. **Defiled**—polluted ; corrupted. **Keen.....defiled**—unavailing remorse for the bloody crime. **Moody Madness** gloomy or sullen madness that depends upon the temperament ; subject to different moods or change of temper. **Severest woe**—greatest misfortune.

St. 9. Vale of years—in the period of advanced life. **Griesly**—ghastly ; terrible. **Troop**—band. **Painful**—the terrible companions of death, i.e., approaching old age and death. **Hideous**—ghastly ; horrible. **Their Queen**—Death. **Racks the joints**—tortures the joint. (Refers to the rheumatic diseases). **Fires the veins**—turns the blood into fire, that causes a burning sensation in veins. **Labouring**—suffering. **Sinew**—the ligament by which the bones are moved. **Strains**—stretches ; distorts. **The deeper vitals**—the internal organs of the body. **Numbs the soul**—deadens the spirit. **Slow consuming..... Age**—age that slowly consumes the vitality of the body.

St. 10. Condemned—destined to. **To groan**—to suffer their peculiar sorrows. **Tender**—the kind-hearted. **Unfeeling**—cruel. **Thought.....paradise**—reflection of the future trouble would shatter their present happiness in life. **Where ignorance.....wise**—where ignorance means happiness, it is not advisable to draw aside the veil which covers the future.

Paraphrase—1. The distant spires and ancient towers of the famous Eton College rise before me, just overhanging the valley of the Thames, where the devotees of knowledge still worship and express their gratitude of the pious memory of Henry VI, its founder. On the other side of the river stands the Windsor Castle which presents a charming view of the beautiful and fertile valley of the Thames with its rich meadows, its green pastures and shady woods through which the river winds its way like a silver thread.

2. Oh, how happy I was in those days, when I roamed over dales and woods, and fields, a careless schoolboy. But what availed it to be happy, when sorrows of life came so soon. Yet as I stand here and look upon the scene, and feel the spring breeze fan my cheeks, I can forget for a little while the sorrow and weariness of my present life. In imagination, I feel again a

schoolboy and experience all gladness and joy once more, as it was in the days of my youth.

3. Tell me after Thames, who has seen generations after generations of happy schoolboys playing on the green banks as we did of yore, which of the present generations of boys take delight in swimming, in bowling the rapid hoop and playing the games of cricket or football.

4. While some young boys are earnestly engaged in their studies for the hours of school, the hours of work and confinement that only serve to give greater joys to rest and play, when they go to them—others, who are more reckless and bold, fly from the limits of the school to unknown regions in search of adventure upon forbidden grounds. They look back as they run, hearing in each gust of wind a voice as if pursuing them, and thereby experience a delight, accompanied with the fear of being caught.

5. All are filled with high hopes of a happy life, and fancy themselves happy, little thinking that it will prove to be less attractive in reality, when once they have got their wish. They are all happy now and soon forget the little sorrow that may have been occasioned by their cheerful nature. All are rosy-checked and full of health and vigour. Their talks are full of extravagant jokes and jests, which arise from their buoyant spirits. No cares disturb their days, no anxiety their life. Having no mental pain or bodily disease to suffer from, their sleep is sound and refreshing, and they are ready to rise with the sun fully refreshed for their day's work.

6. Alas! how carelessly they move about, little thinking of the trials that await them. The present seems their only concern and they are all unconscious of the swift approach of care. But soon they will have to face all the dangers, difficulties and misfortunes that beset man's life on earth. Ah! better to warn them that as long as they are men, they will have to face and wrestle with those troubles of life that are now hidden from their eyes.

7. Alas! the hearts and minds of some will be torn and destroyed by angry passions or by fear and shame, their hearts and bodies will be torn and wasted by the tooth of jealousy or wasting care or stern-faced despair, frightful hopelessness and consuming sorrow.

8. Some shall be victims of ambition and shall attain to wealth and high position only to fall and become an object of scorn, derision and fancy. Some shall be the victims of calumny, slander and lies ; while some shall be deceived by false friends who will ruin them, desert them and then laugh at the ruin they have wrought. Some shall be tortured by remorse, by the strings of their conscious guilt, while some shall go to the mad-houses to rove, and laugh and weep or sing, all unconscious of the depth of their terrible misery.

9. Then begins the period of old age, disease and death, attended by gout, rheumatism, fever etc., more terrible in themselves than death. Then comes poverty to complete the ghastly tale of those sufferings that crush the heat, chill all generous impulses and mar the vigour and strength already lessened by old age.

10. All have to suffer, some in one way and some in the other ; none escapes the common destiny of man, who is born for troubles, those loving and sympathetic towards others suffer for their friends' sake while the hard-hearted have enough to mind their own difficulties. Yet why should men try to forestall their griefs. Sorrow only comes too early to be waited for, while happiness flies too swiftly before it is experienced even to half its extent. Who would be able to enjoy the happiness of youth, if he could foresee the sorrows of the future ? Where ingorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise.

(ii) THE PROGRESS OF POESY

A Pindaric Ode

1

AWAKE, Aeolian lyre, awake,
And give to rapture all thy trembling strings.
From Belicon's harmonious springs
A thousand rills their mazy progress take ;
The laughing flowers that round them blow,
Drink life and fragrance as they flow.
Now the rich stream of music winds along
Deep, majestic, smooth, and strong,
Through verdant vales and Ceres' golden reign :
Now rolling down the steep amain,
Headlong, impetuous, see it pour ;
The rocks and nodding groves rebellow to the roar.

2

O Sovereign of the willing soul,
Parent of sweet and solemn-breathing airs,
Enchanting shell ! the sullen Cares
And frantic Passions hear thy soft control.
On Thracia's hills the Lord of War
Has curb'd the fury of his car,
And dropped his thirsty lance at thy command.
Perching on the sceptred hand
Of Jove, thy magic lulls the feather'd king
With ruffled plumes, and flagging wing :
Quench'd in dark clouds of slumber lie
The terror of his beak, and lightnings of his eye.

3

Thee the voice, the dance, obey,
Temper'd to thy warbled lay.

Predman Krishen Dhar

M.A. (Pol. Sc. Eco. Eng. Hist.) B.L.

Motiyar Rainawari

O'er Idalia's velvet green
 The rosy-crowned Loves are seen

On Cytherea's day,
 With antic Sports, and blue-eyed Pleasures,
 Frisking light in frolic measures ;
 Now pursuing, now retreating,
 Now in circling troops they meet :
 To brisk notes in cadence beating,
 Glance their many-twinkling feet.
 Slow melting strains their Queen's approach declare :
 Where'er she turns the Graces homage pay.
 With arms sublime, that float upon the air,
 In gliding state she wins her easy way :
 O'er her warm cheek and rising bosom move
 The bloom of young Desire and purple light of Love.

4

Man's feeble race what ills await,
 Labour, and Penury, the racks of Pain,
 Disease, and Sorrow's weeping train,
 And Death, sad refuge from the storms of Fate !
 The fond complaint, my song, disprove,
 And justify the laws of Jove.
 Say, has he given in vain the heavenly Muse ?
 Night, and all her sickly dews,
 Her spectres wan, and birds of boding cry,
 He gives to range the dreary sky :
 Till down the eastern cliffs afar
 Hyperion's march they spy, and glitt'ring shafts of war.

5

In climes beyond the solar road,
 Where shaggy forms o'er ice-built mountains roam,
 The Muse has broke the twilight gloom
 To cheer the shiv'ring native's dull abode.
 And oft, beneath the odorous shade
 Of Chili's boundless forests laid,
 She deigns to hear the savage youth repeat
 In loose numbers wildly sweet
 Their feather-cinctured chiefs, and dusky loves.
 Her track, where'er the Goddess roves,

Glory pursue, and generous Shame,
Th' unconquerable Mind, and Freedom's holy flame.

6

Woods, that wave o'er Delphi's steep,
Isles, that crown th' Aegean deep,
Fields, that cool Ilissus laves,
Or where Maeander's amber waves
In lingering lab'rins ths creep,
How do your tuneful echoes languish,
Mute, but to the voice of anguish ?
Where each old poetic mountain
Inspiration breath'd around ;
Every shade and hallow'd fountain
Murmur'd deep a solemn sound :
Till the sad Nine, in Greece's evil hour,
Left their Parnassus for the Latian plains.
Alike they scorn the pomp of tyrant Power,
And coward Vice, that revels in her chains.
When Latium had her lofty spirit lost,
They sought, O Albion ! next thy sea-encircled coast,

7

Far from the sun and summer gale
In thy green lap was Nature's darling laid,
What time, where lucid Avon stray'd,
To him the mighty Mother did unveil
Her awful face : the dauntless child
Stretch'd forth his little arms, and smiled.
This pencil take (she said), whose colours clear
Richly paint the vernal year :
Thine, too, these golden keys, immortal boy !
This can unlock the gates of joy ;
Of horror that, and thrilling fears,
Or ope the sacred source of sympathetic tears.

8

Nor second he, that rode sublime
Upon the seraph-wings Ecstasy,

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He pass'd the flaming bounds of place and time !
 The living throne, the sapphire-blaze,
 Where Angels tremble while they gaze,
 He saw ; but blasted with excess of light,
 Closed his eyes in endless night.
 Behold where Dryden's less presumptuous car,
 Wide o'er the fields of glory bear,
 Two coursers of ethereal race,
 With necks in thunder clothed, and long-resounding pace.

9

Hark, his hands the lyre explore !
 Bright-eyed Fancy, hovering o'er,
 Scatters from her pictur'd urn
 Thoughts that breathe, and words that burn.
 But ah ! 'tis heard no more—
 O Lyre divine ! what daring Spirit
 Wakes thee now ? Though he inherit
 Nor the pride, nor ample pinion,
 That the Theban eagle bear,
 Sailing with supreme dominion
 Through the azure deep of air :
 Yet oft before his infant eyes would run
 Such forms as glitter in the Muse's ray,
 With orient hues, unborrow'd of the sun :
 Yet shall he mount, and keep his distant way
 Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate,
 Beneath the Good how far—but far above the Great.

NOTES

Introduction

Gray wrote two great Pindaric Odes—'The Progress of Poesy' and 'The Bard'. Earlier to these, he also wrote two other odes—'Ode on the Spring' and 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College'. These odes were largely meant for his contemporaries, but the Pindaric Odes, romantic in tone and thought as they are, were written for all time to come. These two Pindaric Odes, therefore, are important landmarks in his production, because they first introduced that romantic element which dominated in the 'Descent of Odin' and the 'Fatal

Sisters'. They belong to the imaginative type of poetry which ceased to follow the beaten track of Augustan poetry.

Construction

The 'Progress of Poesy' has three parts of 41 lines each. In each part, there are three regular divisions: Strophe; Antistrophe and Epode. It is an elaborately consistent verse-form. A perfect artistic structure, as this Ode has, is rarely to be found among other poets. Even Milton's 'Nativity Ode' closes 'abruptly because it is time our tedious song should have ended'. The same is the case with Collins's 'Ode to Liberty', where the opening sound of trumpet music ends suddenly as if the poet got tired of his instrument, and had thrown it away. Shelley also in his longer odes loses himself in the flood of his oratory. Keats and Wordsworth are consistent in their evaluation but of all these poets who handled the difficult form of the ode, Gray is the main example in English literature of a poet possessing this Greek quality of structure in his odes. As Gosse has pointed out, his odes are never chains of consecutive stanzas; each line, each group of lines, has its place in a structure that could not be shorter or longer without a radical rearrangement of ideas.

Analysis

In the first (stanzas 1-3) of 'The Progress of Poesy' the strophe invokes the lyre of Aeolia which was considered by Pindar as the symbol of the art of Poetry. This inspires Gray to sing the songs of ecstatic rapture. He then describes the sources, progress and various forms of that art 'enriching every subject with a pomp of diction and luxuriant harmony of numbers' under the image of a thousand descending streams. Johnson objects against the twelfth line of the first stanza and says that "where does music.....roll down the steep again (line 10) so that rocks and nodding groves rebellow to the roar (line 12)", and this criticism appears quite apt. And then, if the river allegorically stands for the image of poetry, what do the rocks and nodding groves indicate. In the antistrophe, he describes the power of poetry which attracts passions and soothes and subdues them. In the epode the poet shows that poetry works the goodwill of love by means of rhythmic harmony.

In the second part (stanzas 4-6) the strophe reminds the

reader of the ^{Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantala Jammu} Minerva, which is relieved by the ministrations of the heavenly Muse. In fact, the Muse was given to mankind by the same Providence that sends the day by its cheerful presence to dispel the gloom and horrors of the night, in order to compensate for the real and imaginary ills of life. The antistrophe shows the extensive influence of poetic genius over the remotest and most civilized nations : its connection with liberty and the virtues that naturally attend on it. In the epode, the poet describes the progress of poesy from Greece to Italy and from Italy to England, and while dealing with advent of poetic art to Greece, it breaks into an ecstatic celebration.

In the third part (stanzas 7-9) the strophe describes how the awful mother, the Muse, showed her face to Shakespeare. The poet winds up the poem by expressing regret that the Muse of poetry which was once highly honoured in Greece and Rome has now degenerated in the hands of poets like Gray. There is a note of sadness in the concluding lines of the poem and the poem ends on a note of depression.

The first stanza gives a general description of the country round about the Eton College, the second presents the poet's personal reminiscences, the third, fourth and fifth narrow down the description to the boys while the four succeeding ones contain Gray's reflections on them and the last gives a fresh turn to the poet's thought arising out of his personal experience.

Critical Survey

It is a product of purely literary inspiration and bears no reference to the personal experiences of Gray save the literary ones. Gray seems to have taken great pains in turning everything into visual imagery. This effort on his part has rendered the ode obscure and to explain this obscurity, he has had to add footnotes in his second edition. Then these images are vague. Here is an example of his vagueness—

“With arms sublime, that float upon the air,
In gliding state she wins her easy way :
O'er her warm cheek and rising bosom move
The bloom of young Desire and purple light of love.”

The arms of Venus are not sublime. They were rather magnificent, because they were uplifted and her cheeks and bosom are not intermittently exposed to a mauve spotlight, but merely fresh coloured. Gray has made an attempt to imitate Milton in adopting the use of Latin words, in their original sense, but this adaptation has not been effective in this poem. In regard to the metaphor of the first strophe also Johnson complains that Gray has confounded the images of spreading sound and running water but Gray has deliberately done it as he writes in the footnote that "the subject and simile, as usual with Pindar, are united."

Gray has tried to describe the history of about nine centuries within the compass of these lines of the ode, but this "history comes badly to grief in the progress of poesy from Greece to Italy and from Italy to England, where the word 'Latium' seems to do duty both for declining Rome and for the land of the Renaissance." The music and rush of the lines, however, are without fault and Johnson's charge of 'high sounding' does not do justice to the rhythm of this piece. It is considered to be "the first flash of poetic vision by any English poet upon the origins of song and was thus a prophecy of studies to come." The lines devoted to Milton and Dryden are the highest peak of poetic craft and "with its wide horizons, its ardours of feeling and its order of architecture is hard to excel or parallel."

Critical Appreciation

The "Progress of Poesy" is an imitation of the qualities which Gray found in the lyrics of Pindar. "It is a musical chant, in which the ringing splendour of phrases, the elaborated language, the carefully planned allusions and echoes from history, captivate and elevate the mind."

The greatest merit of this ode lies in its perfect artistic structure or evolution. By 'evolution', we mean the systematic rational development of the idea in a poem, which again means that the beauty of structure remains intact and that the thought contained in the poem reaches its completion by a well-proportioned and intelligent process. Speaking about the structure of this ode, Gosse writes: "It is worthy of remark that the power of evolution has not been common among lyrical poets even of a high rank. Even in Milton, it is stran-

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 gely absent and we feel that all his odes, beautiful as they are, do not bud and branch and fall in fruit, closing with the exhaustion of their functions but merely cease because all poems must stop somewhere." The odes of Milton and those of Collins close abruptly, as if their fingers are tired of playing upon the strings of the harp, and even Shelley, a greater artist in the gush of emotion, loses himself in the flood of his oratory without caring for external form and finish not to speak of evolution of thought. The merits of perfect artistic structure, progression and logical sequence of the ideas had been the share of Gray only.

In this poem Gray attempted "the hardest of all poetic forms—the historical lyric" compressing whole centuries into nine stanzas and then abruptly closes the poem after a reference to himself—his achievements and poetic aspirations, without developing the middle, *i. e.*, mediaeval French and Renaissance Italian poetry immediately followed by the glorious outburst of Elizabethan poetry in England. But even after making allowance for this deficiency of Gray and the artificial and over-ornate poetic diction of the day, it cannot be denied that the argument, the evolution of thought and the architectonic skill are all well sustained, the music is faultless and the ode, with its wide horizons, its ardours of feeling and its pomp of varying sounds is hard to excel in English literature.

The 'Progress of Poesy' could not be a popular poem. It was neither popular with Gray's contemporaries nor is it popular with the moderns. Its reason is that Gray was a great scholar and he did want to display his scholarship rather than to please his readers. In regard to pleasing his readers, he thought that poetry was not for all. It was only for 'the fit though few.' This viewpoint of Gray should better be appreciated rather than be misunderstood. When he found that his poems were not understood, he added some footnotes in his second edition, but in doing so, he made a delightfully sarcastic remark reading, "he had too much respect for the understanding of his readers to take that liberty. His explanatory notes are very useful and help the understanding of his long odes." Elton says, "Gray, in fact, had more or less taught that age to admire, if not to understand the long odes."

Besides, the magnificence of its diction, the beauty of its versification, its sublimity and its imaginative power, the 'Progress of Poesy' marks an important place in the development of Gray's poetic genius. In it he departs from the trammels of the eighteenth century poetry. In it he also breaks away from all the traditions of content, form and style. In it again he strikes a note of romanticism. He also gives a new interpretation to it. With Augustans, poetry was a pastime of the cultured few. With Gray, it was a common heritage to be shared by all—the poor and the rich alike, the great and the small alike. This new conception found its ready acceptance in the hands of the Romantics. The 'Progress of Poesy', therefore, contains "the first flash of poetic vision by any English poet upon the origin of song and was thus a prophecy of studies to come.

The style of the ode is artificial. It is ornate. But its lines are musical. Its manner of rhyming, its rapid and recurrent beat of song, was the germ out of which have sprung all later metrical inventions, and without which Mrs. Swinburne herself might now be polishing the heroic couplet to its last perfection of brightness and sharpness."

WORD-MEANINGS AND PARAPHRASE

A Pindaric Ode—Pindar was a Greek lyricist. He wrote odes, which were sung to the accompaniment of a dance. Gray imitated the structure of his odes from Pindar. So he called them 'Pindaric Odes'.

The Title of the Poem—'*The Progress of Poesy*' means 'The history of poetry'. The word 'progress' means 'journey'. It, therefore, means the 'journey of Poetry'. John Bunyan also used the word 'progress' in the sense of 'journey'. His *Pilgrims' Progress* is a description of the journey, his pilgrims had.

St. 1. Sources and varieties of Poetry.

Awake—arouse. **Aeolian**—Aeolia is a place in Asia Minor. It has been associated with the earliest Greek poets like Sappho and Alcæus. It, therefore, means lyric effusion. The famous Greek lyricist, Pindar, also, called his poems as "Aeolian songs". Gray's use of the phrase stands as a symbol of the lyrics.

Rapture—poetic ecstasy. **Trembling strings**—lyrical

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poetry vibrating with music. **Helicon**—it is a mountain in Greece regarded as the haunt of Muses. It stands for heavenly inspiration and means that poetry is of divine origin. **Harmounious springs**—the sacred springs of Hippocrene and Aganippe situated by the side of Helicon, a mountain. Streams of poetry are viewed as descending from these springs. It was believed that any one who drank water from these springs was poetically inspired. Hence the two springs allegorically stand for the “fountain of poetic inspiration”. **Rills**—small streamlets allegorically standing for the various strains of poetry. **Mazy**—zigzag. **Progress**—journey. **Laughing flowers**—beautiful flowers growing by the side of rivulets. They allegorically stand for various themes of poetry. “Laughing” means “fresh coloured.” **Drink life and fragrance**—drink inspiration and charm from life. **The rich stream of Music**—allegorically stands for the dignified and musical style of epic or descriptive poetry of Homer and Virgil. **Deep majestic, smooth and strong**—characteristics of epic poetry which is dignified, impressive and full of grandeur. **Verdant vales**—green valleys. **Ceres’ golden reign**—golden cornfield. The goddess of tillage and corn, hence it stands for the ripe golden harvest. Ceres was the goddess who presided over the growing of corn—of fertility and harvest. **Impetuous**—in torrents. **Nodding groves**—trees and bushes yield to the force of the tumultuous stream. **Nodding**—swaying in the wind ; this is how Gray allegorically represents the rush and conflict of passionate lyrics. **Rebellow to the roar**—re-echo of the sound (“Now the rich stream.....rebellow to the roar.”) In these lines, Gray describes two forceful styles of poetry, the quiet and dignified epic and the passionate lyrics, enriching the life-story of a nation in war or peace with solemn beauty like the brimming river helping to cover the soil with vegetation and harvest.

St. 2. Influence of Poetry on Human Passions.

Sovereign of the willing soul—address for poetry. All submit to the moving music of poetry influencing the souls of both men and animals. Collins also speaks of it in his “Ode to Passions”. **Parent**—creator, or originator. **Solemn-breathing airs**—melodious music that arouses feelings. The phrase has been borrowed from Milton’s *Comus*—“A soft and solemn-breathing sound”. **Enchanting shell**—the charming spirit of poetry, which enchants imagination. **Sullen Cares**—worries

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 and anxieties which make life gloomy. This is a typical example of inspired and uninspired personification. **Frantic Passions**—passions like wrath, ambition, hatred, etc. **Hear thy soft control**—submit to your kinder influence. **Thracia's hills**—Thrace is a province of Greece supposed to be the favourite haunt of Mars, the god of war, who was charmed by the divine music of the Thracian bards. **Lord of War**—Mars. **Thirsty lance**—spear which is thirsty of blood. **Perching**—sitting. **Sceptred hand**—hand holding the sceptre. **Jove**—Jupiter or Zeus, the supreme god of Greeks. **Magic lulls**—your enchanting music induces sleep. **The feather'd king**—Eagle, which is supposed to be the favourite bird of Jupiter. These images are from Pindar. It is an example of artificial poetic diction of the eighteenth century. **Ruffled plumes**—wings relaxed. **Flagging wing**—wings drooping down, a sign of sleep. **Dark clouds of slumber**—sleep stupefies all the senses as cloud blinds the vision. **Lightnings of his eye**—the fiery flashes of his eyes.

N.B.—Mars was checked in the rush and fury of his war-chariot having been overpowered by the harmony of music of Thracian bards.

St. 3. Power of Poetry to produce graces of the body under the Influence of Love.

Thee—poetry. **Voice**—voice of those persons who dance. It is a personification. **Temper'd to thy warbled lay**—made a piece of poetry melodious. The meaning of these two lines is that poetry inspires men to sing as well as to dance to its tune. **Idalia**—Venus, Goddess of Love. There is a temple of Venus at Idalium in Cyprus. **Velvet-green**—soft grassy fields. **Rosy-crowned**—wearing crowns of roses. **Loves**—Cupids. It therefore, represents the youthful spirits of young loves. **Cytherea's day**—a day devoted to the worship of Cytherea. Cytherea is the second name of Venus. **Antic Sports**—fanciful spirits of joy. 'Sports' here means 'costumes'. **Antic**—quaint but not ungraceful. **Blue-eyed Pleasures**—a personification, meaning the blue-eyed youths who indulge in pleasure, i. e., pleasurable songs and dances. **Frisking light**—dancing with light steps. **Frolic measures**—pleasures. **Now pursuing, now retreating**—rhythmic movement of these lovers. **Brisk notes.....beating**—the movement of their feet is rhythmical to the cadence of music. **Glance**—shine. **Twinkling feet**—as feet move, they

having long hair. The Muse has broke the twilight gloom—Poetry has dispersed the darkness of those regions, where the sun rays do not reach. In polar regions the sun is not visible for six months in a year. Here Gray means arctic regions. Odorous shade—fragrance under the shady trees. Chili—a region in South America full of dense forests. She—stands for the Muse. Deigns to hear—is pleased to hear. Savage youth—uncultured young men. Loose numbers—verse of irregular rhyme. Feathercinctured chiefs—their chief wearing girdles of feathers as a mark of distinction. Dusky loves—beloved of dark colour : dark-coloured sweethearts. Generous Shame—feelings of noble shame, i.e., sensitiveness from wrong doing. Unconquerable Mind—undaunted spirit, An imitation from Milton's unconquerable will. Freedom's holy flame—love of freedom burning like a flame in the mind. When the mind is inspired with the sacred feeling of liberty, it revolts against all wrongs and vices. The mind stands up for human rights.

St. 6. Progress of Poetry from Greek to Renaissance in England.

Woods, that wave—forests that toss their heads. Delphi's steep—steep of the mountain on which the oracle of the temple of Delphi is situated. Delphi is a very ancient oracular shrine of Apollo, situated in a deep rocky cleft on the south-west spur of Mount Parnassus. As Apollo is the god of poetry, Delphi also is associated with the early Greek religious poetry of Hesoid and Pindar. That crown—that adore. Aegean deep—Aegean Sea between Asiatic coast and Greece. The islands around the Aegean Sea were inhabited by Greeks, and some of these isles were associated with Greek poetry. Delos was famed to be the birthplace of Apollo. Ilissus—a river flowing by the end of Athens. Laves—washes. Macander—a river in Asia Minor. Asia Minor is the home of Homer, the great Greek epic poet. Hence it is associated with Greek epic poetry. Amber waves—bright waves, yellow water. In lingering Lab'r-inths creep—flow in a very slow and zigzag course. Tuneful—sweet ; harmonious. Languish—become lifeless ; decay. Mute—dumb. Voice of anguish—sad voice of sorrow. Poetic mountain—Mountains of Greece, as they were associated with poetry. Inspiration breath'd around—inspired people to write poetry, spread the charm of inspired poetry. Nine—Nine Muses of fine arts were sad at the degeneration of Greece when

she lost her freedom having been conquered by Rome. **Parnasus**—a mountain considered to be the abode of the Muses. **Latian plains**—plains of Italy. Rome was built in the Latium district. **They**—pronoun for the Muses. **Pomp of tyrant Power**—Italy also became a land of tyrants. **Coward Vice**—people became cowards under the tyranny of the tyrants. **Revels in her chains**—delights in slavery. **Latium**—Rome, i.e., Romans of Italy. **They**—the Muses. **Albion**—Old Roman name of England. 'Alba' means white, the reference being to the white chalk cliffs of Dover on the southern coast of England.

St. 7. Shakespeare—Nature's Favourite Child.

The sun and summer-gale—away from Greece and Italy, which have a warm climate. The meaning is—Shakespeare was born in a cold country which is not quite favourable to poetic genius. **Nature's darling**—reference to Shakespeare. **What time**—at the time when. **Avon**—a river in Stratford. **Stray'd**—flowed. **Mighty Mother**—nature. **Did unveil**—revealed her secrets. **Vernal year**—spring. **Thine, too**—I give you. **Golden keys**—power of paintings symbolical for rich power. **Immortal boy**—Shakespeare. **This**—one of these keys. **Gates of joy**—The reference is to the comedic power of Shakespeare. **Of horror**—reference is to tragedies. **Ope**—open. **Sacred source of.....tears**—arouse the feelings of pity and sympathy in human heart. Tragedy chastens the human soul and reconciles it to suffering.

Lines 93-94. These lines beautifully depict the ennobling and chastening influence of the tragedies of Shakespeare in the heart of man. According to Aristotle, Tragedy chastens the human heart with sympathetic feelings of distress for the suffering good."

St. 8. Milton and Dryden.

Nor second he—reference to Milton. **Seraph-wings**—Angelic wings of poetry. **Ecstasy**—rapture ; poetic inspiration. **Abyss**—the limitless region of space in which earth and Hell exist. **To spy**—to see. **Flaming bounds**—the flaming boundary of Heaven. **Place and time**—our earth. **The living throne**—the dazzling throne of God **Sapphire**—brightness as of sapphire stone ; a stone which shines brightly. **Blasted**—blinded ; **dazzled by excessive light**. **Dryden's less presumptuous car**—the

more humble poetic chariot of Dryden. Gray regards Dryden as a lesser poet, more humble and less ambitious poet than Milton. **Wide o'er the fields of glory**—Dryden attempted many poetic forms—drama, satire, translations of the old classics. In each of these forms, he achieved glory. **Bear**—draw the chariot. **Courasers**—war horses; heroic couplets. Reference is to the heroic couplet of Dryden. **Ethereal**—heavenly. **Thunder clothed**—necks of the horses are clothed with shining sheets like clouds lit up by lightnings. Again there is a reference to the rhythmic beauty of the heroic couplet. **Long-resounding pace**—refers to the sonorous sound and the majestic roll of harmony in the couplets.

St. 9. Dryden's Lyrics and Gray's Poetic Performances.

Hark—listen. **His hands the lyre explore**—reference is to the lyrical genius of Dryden. **Bright-eyed Fancy**—imagination which sparkles with emotion. **Pictur'd urn**—a vessel containing words and thoughts of imagination. **What daring Spirit**—Gray refers to himself. **Nor ample pinion**—wide wings. Range and flight of poetic imagination. **Theban eagle**—Pindar, who was the native of Thebes and the best of lyric poets. Hence the comparison **Bear**—possesses. **Infant eyes**—infancy! childhood. **Such forms**—such poetic images or visions. **Orient hues**—rich colours. **Unborrow'd of the sun**—original; not derived from the light of the sun. **Mount**—go on writing. **Keep his distant way**—follow his own course. Gray means to say that he will keep himself aloof from the tracks of common men and famous lyricists. **Vulgar fate**—the level of the ordinary poets; the destiny of common men.¹ **The Good**—good poets like Dryden, Milton and Shakespeare. **The Great**—those who have wealth and position in society.

Paraphrase

St. 1. Sources and Varieties of Poetry.

The poet (Gray) invokes the Aeolian lyre, the spirit of the Greek lyrical poetry, and requests it to inspire him to that ecstatic level of poetry which may enable him to sing songs full of rapture and sweet music. He, then, describes the sources

1. "Gray may be reckoned among poets such as Horace and Shakespeare, who have truly predicted their own posthumous fame".—(Wheeler).

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of poetry in an allegorical way. It flows, he says, like the streams of water flowing from the springs of the Helicon mountain, which is the abode of Muses. Along these streams grow many beautiful flowers, which derive their life and fragrance from the water of these channels. The metaphor of stream has been carried on throughout the stanza. It suggests that the inspiration of a poet is always heavenly or that he is always heavenly inspired to sing and this heavenly inspiration breaks forth in various channels. It means to convey that inspiration is heavenly while the themes differ with the poets and that they decorate their poetry with grace and beauty whatever their themes may be. This poetry enriches life and makes it sweet and smiling. Taking the allegory further, he says that the stream of poetry, like the stream itself, flows quietly and majestically, marking the calm grandeur of an epic poem. And, very much like the stream again, when it is violent through the steep rocks resounding the roaring sound of the water, the poetry also rushes on in a tumultuous manner indicating the passionate onrush of emotions.

N. B.—This stanza deals with the source of poetry and its varieties. Every kind of poetry, according to Gray, is inspired by the Muses and some of them deal with commonplace themes while the others describe the passionate yearnings of the soul.

This stanza is a good example of the method of Gray. He has tried to imitate the poetic fervour of Pindar. The music of the lines is faultless.

St. 2. Influence of Poetry on the Human Passions.

In these lines Gray speaks of the power of harmony, which influences the soul. As a result of its spell, even Mars, the God of War, had stopped his furious driving and even thrown away his blood-thirsty lance, when he heard the music of Orpheus and Mauseus. Again, the fierce eagle sitting on the right hand of Jupiter is lulled to sleep by the sweet harmonies and its wings relax and drop down when it is asleep. The thirsty sparkling eyes of the eagle and its terrible beak seem to have been satisfied of their thirst through the powers of poetry. By giving these mythological examples, Gray wants to bring home that poetry has the power to curb even the strongest sources and passions of the human heart—the passions for war and the savage instinct of destroying the weak.

N. B.—There is an excessive load of symbolism in the poem and the symbols used by the poet demand a careful attention to catch the significance. Critics have found fault with the last two lines. The 'lightnings of his eye' be 'quenched' but how 'the terror of his beak' can justify this phrase.

St. 3. Power of Poetry to produce bodily graces under the Passions of Love.

Poetry has the power to produce all the graces of motion in the body under the softer passion of love. The young men and women, crowned with roses, display their love for Venus, joining together in the celebration of the goddess of Love and, in a sportive spirit, they dance and frisk before the image of Cytherea. During the course of dance these young men first produce in one direction lightly and then they retreat and meet together making a circle with the rhythmical movement of feet, which has much similarity with the musical cadence of their song which they sing while dancing. While frisking on their feet and beating them on a musical cadence of songs, these young men gaze at their flashing feet. Their tender and touching notes indicate that their queen has appeared.

St. 4. Poetry compensates Man for the Ills of Life.

The goddesses of Beauty (Aglaiā, Thalia and Euphrosyne), who attend upon Venus, pay their homage to the queen (Venus) in whatever direction or position she may be. And Venus keeps on walking slowly and stately with her raised arms. The intensity of the youthful passion can be marked from her flushed cheeks. The rising bosom and rosy brightness of the queen (Venus) indicates the spirit of love deep-rooted in her.

The helpless race of man is subject to various vices and ills, misfortunes and sufferings. Man is crushed under the tyrant wheels of labour, want, disease, poverty and pain. But poetry compensates for all these ills. It consoles man and elevates his spirit. Man also suffers from some of the imaginary horrors. He is afraid of the ghosts and the cry of the owl. But poetry cheers him up. These horrors are dispelled. Gray says that just as pale ghosts and ominous birds that wander during the darkness of the night disappear at sunrise, in the same way, all the ills of life vanish as the sun of poetry appears on the horizon of life.

N.B.—Wheeler adds, "Gray's justification, given in the last six lines, takes the form of a rule of three : as sunrise is to terrors of night, so is poetry to the ills of life."

St. 5. The Universal Influence of Poetry.

Gray says that even in those regions which lie beyond the orbit of the sun and persons with long hair live on the snow-covered mountains, poetry has withered the sadness of the inhabitants of those regions and has served the purpose of light for that dull region in filling it with joy and pleasure. So in the forests of Chili also, the Goddess Poetry is pleased to find the young men repeating their wild and loosely composed songs under the odorous trees and singing the praises of chiefs, who put on girdles of feathers, and also describing the beauty of their dark-coloured sweethearts. Wherever the goddess of poetry wanders, glories and noble feelings of shame follow her (i. e., poetry stirs the human hearts for glorious deeds and makes him feel ashamed for doing wrong). Men are awakened to challenge, oppression and injustice and they are inspired by the sacred feelings of liberty and freedom.

N.B.—Gray was the only man, vrey much against the spirit of his contemporaries, who dived deep into "Erse, Norwegian and Welsh fragments, the Lapland and American songs." By opening these new treasures, he looked ahead and gave a note of romanticism. The Augustans regarded poetry wholly as an art of the highly civilized communities and the heritage of the cultured few. They could not imagine that poetry could exist even among the common men or the savages. Gray was the first man to realise it and takes it as an inspiration rather than taking it as a mere technique.

St. 6. Progress of Poetry from Greece to Italy and thence to England.

In these lines, the progress of poetry from Greece to Italy and from Italy to England is traced. Greece was the home of various kinds of poetry. He (Gray) addresses those woods, which toss their heads in the steep of the mountains, where the oracle of Delphi is built. Delphi is closely associated with Hesiod and Pindar. He also addresses the islands of Aegean Sea where Delos rose and Phoebus sprang, where burning Sapho loved and sang. Fields and plains have also been addressed by him, where Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles

lived and sang immortal and heart-touching songs. These are the plains where the famous river Meander flows majestically in a zigzag course with its yellowish water and where was born the great poet Homer. How is it, then, that the great poetry of Greece has lost its charm. And, even if it sings, it only laments the degeneration of the Greeks. At the degeneration of the great epic poetry of Greeks, the nine deities of fine arts settled in the land of Rome. But, there too, they could not live long. They hated the oppression, on the one hand, and grandeur, on the other, of the Roman Kings, just as they denounced the moral depravity of the Greeks, who felt joy even in their slavery. From Rome then the Muses went to England.

N.B.—The historical progress as outlined by Gray has its faults. Gray has omitted to mention the fine medieval poetry of the French poets and the Italian Renaissance poetry of Dante and Petrarch. Oliver Elton has remarked, "History comes to grief in the progress of poetry from Greece to Italy and from Italy to England, where the word Latium seems to do duty both for declining Rome and for the land of the Renaissance."

St. 7. Shakespeare—the favourite Child of Nature.

In these lines, Gray gives a detailed account of the poetic genius of Shakespeare. Shakespeare was born in the green lap of Nature and became England's darlin'. At the place where the shining river, Avon, flows on, the mighty mother Nature revealed to him all the secrets of outer manifestations as well as the inner workings and that the bold child instead of fearing from the awful face of Nature stretched his arms smiling and begged for a boon. The mother Nature then gave him a brush and asked him to paint the rich beauties of Nature with that brush. Indeed, Nature endowed Shakespeare with the powers of creating an immortal literature. She bestowed upon him the wonderful gifts of comedy and tragedy with which he could move his readers to laughter and tears.

St. 8. Milton, the Poet of the Celestial Vision and Dryden, the Poet of Sonorous Couplets.

Here Gray gives an account of the poetic genius of Milton and Dryden. In his own sphere of epic poetry, Milton was second to none. He rode on the angelic wings of poetic imagination to explore the secrets of chaos (space between hell

and earth). He passed through the flaming boundary which separates the earth and heaven. He beheld the bright radiance of the throne of the Almighty as if Sapphire is producing a sparkling blaze. Even the angels, who attend upon God, tremble to see the excessively dazzling light of the throne, but for Milton, who also got dazzled at the light, this light became a perpetual night and he became blind.

Dryden was comparatively, a poet of lesser genius, but he also achieved great glory and fame over a vast field, drama, poetry and classics. The chariot of poetry is drawn by two war horses of heavenly breed wearing a mane-sheet around their neck which shines like thunder and the sound of their spurs continues to echo and re-echo in the atmosphere. What Gray means to convey is that the heroic couplets of Dryden have earned for him a wide reputation and his sonorous verses have a rhythmic beauty and vitality.

St. 9. Dryden's Lyric Powers—Gray's Achievements and Aspirations.

The description of Dryden's poetic powers is continued in this stanza and, in the end, Gray makes a modest reference to his own poetic performance. Gray, in these lines, speaks of Dryden's hands, which are playing upon the lyre (lyric poetry) and the bright-eyed goddess of Fancy (imagination is bright due to emotion) is hovering over the head of Dryden and scattering beautiful poetic imageries from her urn, which are full of life and warm expressions. Gray is sorry at the fact that lyre could no longer be heard, for Dryden was then dead. Speaking of self, he writes that he has neither the lofty inspiration nor the wide range of imagination with which the famous Greek poet, Pindar, was gifted, who could fly to the realms of the blue sky with the supreme confidence of defeating all his rivals. Gray, from his very childhood, had poetic vision of rich and bright colours and he thought, he would go on following his path of lyric poetry and would lead a path of lofty aspirations, which common man could not lead. Though his rank would be much below those who would be really good, yet he would be far above those, who were called great on the basis of power and wealth.

N.B.—Gray ends the poem, as he began it, by a special mention of the Ode, as a poetic form.

Analysis

The general scheme of the poem is as indicated below :

Lines 1-12 : An allegorical description of the various sources and origin of poetry—described allegorically.

Lines 13-24 : Power of poetry to curb the turbulent passion or sallies of the soul.

Lines 25-41 : Power of poetry to produce all the graces of motion in the body under the softer passion of love.

Lines 42-53 : Power of poetry to compensate the real and imaginary ills of life.

Lines 54-65 : Universal influence of poetic genius over the remotest nations of the world, inspiring mankind with the ideal of liberty and other natural virtues.

Lines 66-82 : Progress of poetry in the civilised world, i. e., its rise in Greece and thence through Italy to England.

Lines 83-94 : The poetic genius of Shakespeare.

Lines 95-107 : The poetic genius of Milton and Dryden.

Lines 108-123 : Dryden as a lyric poet, Poetic achievements and aspirations of Gray.

(III) ODE ON THE BARD

A Pindaric Ode

I (i)

'RUIN seize thee, ruthless King !
Confusion on thy banners wait !
Though fann'd by Conquest's crimson wing
They mock the air with idle state.
Helm, nor hauberk's twisted mail,
Nor e'en thy virtues, tyrant, shall avail
To save thy secret soul from nightly fears,
From Cambria's curse, from Cambria's tears !'
—Such were the sounds that o'er the crested pride
Of the first Edward scatter'd wild dismay,
As down the steep of Snowdon's shaggy side
He wound with toilsome march his long array :
Stout Glo'ster stood aghast in speechless trance ;
'To arms !' cried Mortimer, and couched his quivering
lance.

I (ii)

On a rock, whose haughty brow
Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,
Robed in the sable garb of woe,
With haggard eyes the poet stood ;
(Loose his beard and hoary hair
Streamed like a meteor to the troubled air ;)
And with a master's hand and prophet's fire
Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre :
'Hark, how each giant oak and desert cave
Sighs to the torrent's awful voice beneath !
O'er thee, O King ! their hundred arms they wave,
Revenge on thee in hoarser murmurs breathe ;
Vocal on more, since Cambria's fatal day,
Than e'er on Freedom's lap, or soft Llewellyn's lay.

I (iii)

'Cold is, Cadwallo's tongue,
That hushed the stormy main :
Brave Urien sleeps upon his craggy bed :
Mountains, ye mourn in vain
Modred, whose magic song
Made huge Plinlimmon bow his cloud-topt head.
On dreary Arvon's shore they lie
Smeared with gore and ghastly pale :
Far, far aloof the affrighted ravens sail ;
The famished eagle screams, and passes by.
Dear lost companions of my tuneful art,
Dear as the light that visits these sad eyes,
Dear as the ruddy drops that warm my heart,
Ye died amidst your dying country's cries—
No more I weep. They do not sleep ;
On yonder cliffs, a griesly band,
I see them sit ; they linger yet,
Avengers of their native land :
With me in dreadful harmony they join,
And weave with bloody hands the tissue of thy line.

II (i)

"Weave the warp and weave the woof,
The winding-sheet of Edward's race :
Give ample room and verge enough
The characters of hell to trace.
Mark the year and mark the night
When Severn shall re-echo with affright
The shrieks of death through Berkley's roofs that ring,
Shrieks of an agonizing king !
She-wolf of France, with unrelenting fangs
That tear'st the bowels of thy mangled mate,
From thee be born, who o'er thy country hangs
The scourge of Heaven ! What terrors round him wait !
Amazement in his van, with flight combined,
And sorrow's faded form, and Solitude behind.

II (ii)

"Mighty victor, mighty lord,
 Low on his funeral couch he lies !
 No pitying heart, no eye, afford
 A tear to grace his obsequies.
 Is the sable warrior fled ?
 Thy son is gone. He rests among the dead.
 The swarm that in thy noon-tide beam were born ?
 — Gone to salute the rising morn.
 Fair laughs the morn, and soft the zephyr blows,
 While proudly riding o'er the azure realm
 In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes :
 Youth on the prow, and Pleasure at the helm :
 Regardless of the sweeping Whirlwind's sway,
 That, hush'd in grim repose, expects his evening prey.

II (iii)

"Fill high the sparkling bowl,
 The rich repast prepare ;
 Reft of a crown, he yet may share the feast :
 Close by the regal chair
 Fell Thirst and Famine scowl
 A baleful smile upon their baffled guest.
 Heard ye the din of battle bray,
 Lance to lance, and horse to horse ?
 Long years of havoc urge their destined course,
 And through the kindred squadrons mow their way.
 Ye towers of Julius, London's lasting shame,
 With many a foul and midnight murder fed,
 Revere his consort's faith, his father's fame.
 And spare the meek usurper's holy head !
 Above, below, the rose of snow,
 Twined with her blushing foe, we spread ;
 The bristled boar in infant-gore
 Wallows beneath the thorny shade.
 Now, brothers, bending o'er the accursed loom,
 Stamp we our vengeance deep, and ratify his doom.

III (i)

“Edward, lo ! to sudden fate
 (Weave we the woof ; The thread is spun ;)
Half of thy heart we consecrate.
 The web is wove ; The work is done.)”
Stay, O stay ! nor thus forlorn
Leave me unblest’d, unpitied, here to mourn :
In yon bright track that fires the western skies
They melt, they vanish from my eyes.
But O ! what solemn scenes on Snowdon’s height
 Descending slow their glittering skirts unroll ?
Visions of glory, spare my aching sight,
 Ye unborn ages, crowd not on my soul !
No more our long-lost Arthur we bewail :—
All hail, ye genuine kings ! Britannia’s issue, hail !

III (ii)

‘Girt with many a baron bold
Sublime their starry fronts they rear ;
 And gorgeous dames, and statesmen old
In bearded majesty, appear.
In the midst a form divine !
Her eye proclaims her of the Briton-line :
Her lion-port, her awe-commanding face
Attempted sweet to virgin-grace.
What strings symphonious tremble in the air,
 What strains of vocal transport round her play ?
Hear from the grave, great Taliessin, hear ;
 They breathe a soul to animate thy clay.
Bright Rapture calls, and soaring as she sings,
Waves in the eye of heaven her many-coloured wings.

III (iii)

‘The verse adorn again
 Fierce war, and faithful love,
And Truth severe, by fairy Fiction drest.
 In buskin’d measures move
 Pale grief, and pleasing pain,

With horror, tyrant of the throbbing breast.
 A voice as of the cherub-choir
 Gales from blooming Eden bear,
 And distant warblings lessen on my ear,
 That lost in long futurity expire.
 Fond impious man, think'st thou you sanguine cloud
 Raised by thy breath, has quenched the orb of day ?
 Tomorrow he repairs the golden flood
 And warms the nations with redoubled ray.
 Enough for me : with joy I see
 The different doom our fates assign :
 Be thine despair and sceptred care ;
 To triumph and to die are mine.'
 —He spoke, and headlong from the mountain's height
 Deep in the roaring tide he plunged to endless night.

NOTES

Introduction

The six poems published in one edition and the Elegy consolidated Gray's reputation and by the spring of 1753, he was described as the "sweetest of our elegiac poets." Between 1752 and 1757, he wrote two Pindaric odes, which he himself ranked higher than the Elegy. These were "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard". These are, indeed, difficult poems, "obscure, allusive, soaring at times into rhapsody and even in incantations". Gray had been deep in study of Pindar and made thorough notes.

The composition of 'The Bard' was begun probably in the year 1754 and the completion of it took full two years and five months and the slowness of its growth was the subject of mirth with Gray himself, who called it an odicle, a small ode, and made fun of its slow progress. It appears that Gray collected these scattered parts actively in May, 1757, when he listened to the performance of a Welsh blind harper named J. Parry, at Cambridge. Gray himself writes, "Mr. Parry has put my ode in motion again and has brought it at last to completion." This ode was published along with "The Progress of Poesy" in Walton's press.

Construction

It is also a Pindaric Ode constructed in close imitation of the Pindaric scheme. The metre is very much similar to that of *The Progress of Poesy*. But there are some details of difference. For instance, the stanzas are longer. There are three-foot lines in the Epode. The rhyme formulae are not quite the same. There are no double-ending rhymes, such as Mountain—Fountain. There is a middle rhyme in lines 15 and 17 of each Epode, as “Above, below, the rose of snow.” There is more alliteration in “The Bard” than in “The Progress of Poesy”, e. g., lines 32-34, “mountains—mourn—Modred—magic—made”. The evolution of thought and the proportionate and well-ordered texture of the Ode are admirable. The following analysis will show the progression of the idea.

Analysis

This ode is based on a tradition that when Edward I conquered Wales, he ordered all the bards that fell into his hands to be put to death.

(Lines 1-46). As Edward I and his army were toiling through the mountainous district of Snowdon, the voice of a Welsh Bard, seated on a crag above the Conway, struck terror into the hearts of the host. In the name of his conquered country, he cursed the king and swore vengeance on him and his descendants for the murder of the bards whose spirits were watching him from the cliffs.

(Lines 47-110). These ghosts of the dead bards and the living bards together foretold the murder of Edward II, the horrors of the French War, the death of the Black Prince, the lonely death bed of Edward III, with no one to pity him. They foretold how the gay, pleasure-loving Richard II would be starved to death, how the long wars of the Roses would bring about the murders in the Tower of Henry VI and the young princes, and how Richard III would perish. Then, suddenly turning back to Edward I, they pronounced the doom of his beloved queen. All the time they were chanting their prophecies, they were weaving the mystic web of Fate for each of their victims. Then they vanished and the Bard foretold the rise of the Tudor dynasty “who be genuine kings” because they will be descended from Welsh chieftains.

(Lines 111-144). Gray describes Queen Elizabeth and her

Court and the revival of poetry in the persons of Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. The race of Edward will perish, but the race of Bards shall never die.

Critical Appreciations

'The Bard' is a Pindaric Ode. It expresses the sentiments of the bard and not of the poet. Gray makes the Bard speak and pronounce vengeance upon Edward I and his race. This venerable and mysterious being, in the words of Gray himself, "with a voice more than human reproaches the king with all the misery and desolation, which he had brought on his country, foretells the misfortunes of the Norman race, and with prophetic spirit, declares that all his cruelty shall never extinguish the noble ardour of poetic genius in this island, and that men shall never be wanting to celebrate true virtue and valour in immortal strains, to expose vice and infamous pleasure and boldly censures tyranny and oppression."

There is essentially a motive behind the description of the singing bards by Edward I and then the making of the prophecies by the only left Bard. This thread of allegory woven into the texture of historical incidents suggests the power of poetry for condemning vices and praising the virtues and valour.

The scheme of the ode is strictly historical, but it is very much like the other ode—'The Progress of Poesy'. The main theme of the Ode is the 'dignity of genius' and its function as the ruler and benefactor of mankind. But Gray does not confine himself to tracing the 'nobler ardour of genius' and to abstract consideration of history. He diverts himself into a concrete observation of its most picturesque forms and thus paints for univivid pictures of Edward II enduring his torture in Berkley Castle, and also of the massacre of the bards at the battle of Colman. Some of the images, that pass across the magic mirror of the old man's imagination are superb and are a marvel of concision and force. The image of the Court of Elizabeth surrounded by her lords and her poets, which flashes upon the inner eye, is unrivalled in its felicity :

"Girt with many a baron bold
Sublime their starry fronts they rear ;
And gorgeous dames, and statesmen old

In the midst a form divine !
Her eye proclaims her of the Briton-line :
Her lion-port, her awe-commanding face
Attempered sweet to virgin-grace.
What strings symphonious tremble in the air,
What strains of vocal transport round her play ?
Hear from the grave great Taliessin, hear ;
They breathe a soul to animate thy clay.
Bright Rapture calls, and soaring as she sings,
Waves in the eye of heaven her many-coloured wings."

Gray was a scholar. He could not, therefore, touch a single theme without cultivated scholarship. But in the adoption of a Welsh theme in 'The Bard,' the motive was not scholarly. His motive was to supply passion to his poetry and so his life. The denunciation of Edward I, the British invader, by the last bard, supplies violent feeling and extravagance of expression. It is for the violent feeling and extravagance of expression that 'the Bard' is bolder in design and more romantic in tone. It has a pronounced romantic bias. It absolutely breaks away with the classical school and proclaims a literary declaration of independence.

This ode was not received with satisfaction. It had caused greater perplexity to Gray's contemporaries. They were disconcerted by the vast incantation, the torrential rhapsody of a Celtic seer, which the poet had fitted together with its wildly romantic descriptive setting into a classical framework of the utmost strictness. Its abrupt opening, unexpected internal rhymes wondered everyone. The subject was unfamiliar and therefore, unacceptable. The dip of the poet in absolute mythology and his economy of packing the sense in small phrases presented a great problem for the contemporary readers, who were not expected to know about the race, about which people knew very little. The poem, though lyrical, is not a perfect lyric due to the dramatic touch awarded to it. The poem abounds in visualised images of the dynasty of Edward I and the fortunes and misfortunes that befell on his successors have been beautifully conveyed. The same tidal movement of 'The Progress of Poesy' is to be found in this verse also and "there is more of the grandiose diction which we feel to be obsolete."

Gray has, however, been able to evince his metrical power, his skill in faultless evolution, in stamping the poem with his

genius for certain stateliness and dramatic vision. Edmund Gosse speaks of this poem in the following words : "The Ode so rudely spoken of is no less than that Bard which for at least a century remained almost without a rival among poems cherished by strictly poetical persons for the qualities of sublimity and pomp of vision. It is only in the very latest generation, and among a school of extremely refined critics that the ascendancy of this ode has been questioned and certain pieces by Collins and even by Blake preferred to it. There is a great and even a legitimate pleasure in praising that which plainly possesses very high merit and which has too long been overlooked or neglected, but we must be aware of the paradox which denies beauty in a work of art because beauty has always been discovered there. Gray's "Bard" has enjoyed an instant and sustained popularity, while Collin's noble 'Ode to Liberty' has had few admirers and Blake's 'Book of Thel' till lately had none ; but there is no just reason why a wish to assert the value of the patriotic fervour of the one poem and the rosy effusion of the other should prevent us from acknowledging that great as are the qualities of these pieces, the human sympathy, historical imagination, and sustained dithyrambic dignity of the Bard are also great, and probably greater."

NOTES

The Title—The bard was the last survivor of the great race of Celtic singers, who were, it is believed, put to death by Edward I after his conquest of Wales. Gray mentions himself that this poem was "founded on a tradition current in Wales, that Edward I, when he completed the conquest of that country, ordered all the bards that fell into his hands to be put to death."

Strophe—I (i). **Ruin seize thee**—may destruction befall on you. (The poem opens with a curse of ruin on Edward I). **Ruthless**—merciless. **King**—Edward I. **Confusion**—defeat ; destruction. **Fann'd**—glorified. **Conquest's crimson wing**—victory that you have attained over Wales. Victory is here imagined as a blood-stained and savage bird of prey. **Idle state**—useless sort of glory. **Helm**—warrior's hat or helmet. **Hauberk**—armour for body. **Twisted mail**—ringlets closely interwoven into a diamond pattern. **Virtue's foundation**—character and courage. **Tyrant**—king

Edward I. Shall avail—shall be helpful. **Nightly fears**—darkness of soul's chamber (conscience) ; pricks of conscience. **Cambria**—old Latin word for Wales. **Crested pride**—haughty crown, helmeted head. (This phrase has been borrowed from Dryden's—"the Crested Adder's Pride.") **Dismay**—confusion. **Snowdon**—a mountainous tract from Carnarvon to Conway river. **Shaggy**—woody. **He wound**—he led in a zig-zag way. **Toilsome march**—difficult journey. **Array**—army. **Glo'ster**—duke of Gloucester, son-in-law of King Edward. **Stood aghast**—bewildered. **Mortimer**—Edmond-de-Mortimer who was enjoying grant of land. **Couched**—caught hold of ; held ready in hand. **His quivering lance**—because his hand was trembling with fear, anger and excitement.

I (ii). **Haughty brow**—arrogant peak of the rock. **Conway**—a river in North Wales. **Sable garb**—dark dress. **Haggard eyes**—wild looks. **The poet**—the last surviving Bard. **Meteor**—a star. Just as a meteor leaves behind it a track of white light in the darkness of the night, in the same way the white streaming beard of the bard shone against the rugged background of the green forest on the mountain. (This phrase seems to have been borrowed from Milton's 'Paradise Lost, Bk. I'—537 : "Shone like a meteor, streaming to the wind.") **Master's hand**—in a skilled manner. **Prophet's fire**—words were prophetic. (In fact a prophet is divinely inspired. The meaning here is that the bard has started playing on the lyre under a divine inspiration). **Hark**—listen. **Giant oak**—huge oak tree. 'Giant oak' is symbolical of the past tradition. **Desert cave**—cave now deserted. **Sighs**—(verb) refers to the rustling sound of the oak trees. **Torrent's awful voice**—cascades of water tumbling down. The word 'sighs' seems to be used in two senses—the sound of the wind in the trees and the echo of the torrent in the empty caves. **Hoarser**—rougher. **Vocal no more**—no more responsive to the music. **Cambria's fatal day**—sad day when Wales lost her independence after her final conquest. **Hoel's harp**—a bard of priestly rank. **Llewellyn's lay**—Llewellyn's song. Llewellyn is the last Welsh ruler. "Soft is the epithet commonly used of Llewellyn in contemporary poetry."—(Palgrave).

I (iii). **Cadwallo**—a British king of North Wales in the 7th Century killed in battle in 635 A. D. **Hushed**—silenced. **Stormy main**—stormy ocean. (Cadwallo silenced the raging storms of the ocean through the charm of magic). **Urien**—

king of Cambria. He was a warrior poet. **Craggy**—rough. **Modred**—it is suggested by Palgrave that Gray employed this name for Merlin or Myrddinwylt who was held to be a prophet and poet. **Magic song**—highly musical sound. **Plinlimmon**—a mountain peak in the north of Cardigan. **Modred** **cloud-topped head**—Modred had the power of charming the lofty peaks of mountains. They bent down their cloudy tops in delight and thus yielded to the magical power of his song. **Arvon's shore**—shores of Carnarvonshire opposite to the Isle of Anglesey. They—the contemporary poets. **Smeared with gore**—covered with blood. **Affrighted**—terrified. **Ravens**—vultures. **Famished**—hungry. On dreary Arvons shore they lie—so horrible is the crime that even the birds of prey are terrified and pass by without attacking the corpses. **Companions**—co-professionals or comrades in my profession. **Ruddy**—red (bloody). **Warm**—throb. **Dear**.....**heart**—from Shakespeare's 'Julius Ceaser'—

“As dear to me as are the ruddy drops
That visit my sad heart.”

Country's cries—the cries of the nation at the loss of independence. **Griely band**—terrible spirits of poets. **Avengers of their native land**—seeking revenge for their mother-country. **Join**—co-operate. **Tissue of thy line**—the cloth on which the misfortunes that were to fall on the descendants of Edward I, will be inscribed in figures. (It is weaving some texture like the witches of *Macbeth*).

Antistrophe— II (i). (Here Gray is addressing the Furies, Fates or Valkyries to weave the texture for the progeny of Edward I).

Warp—threads spread lengthwise on the loom. **Woof**—threads spread crosswise on the warp to be woven into it. **Winding-sheet of Edward's race**—coffin wrapped along the dead bodies of Edward's successors. This incantation is chanted by the Bard and by the ghosts of the dead bards who all the time are weaving 'the winding-sheet of Edward's race'. **Verge**—margin. **The characters of hell to trace**—to write down the whole story of the tragedy of Edward's race. **Mark the year and mark the night**—this reference is a pointer towards the murder of Edward II, son of Edward I, who was murdered on the night of September 21, 1327, in Berkeley Castle near Berkeley, a river in England. **Agonising King**—Edward II, who

suffered extreme agony and pain of death. **She-wolf of France**—Isabella of France (daughter of the French king and wife of Edward II.) **Unrelenting fangs**—cruel teeth or claws. **Bowels**—interiors. **Mangled mate**—wounded husband, Edward II. (*N. B.* It is said that Isabella was responsible for the murder of her husband and she got him killed by her lover, Mortimer.) **From thee be born.....the scourge of Heaven**—fate decrees that from her shall be born a son (Edward III) who will prove a scourge (plague of heaven) to her country. The reference is to the first part of the Hundred Years' War, the battles of Crecy and Poitiers and the fall of Calais. Note the use of personification here. (In fact Edward III defeated and crushed France. It was, therefore, a punishment on Isabella sent by Heaven for murdering her husband). **What terrors round him wait**—what terrors are there in store for France. These terrors are described in the next two lines. **Van**—vanguard of Edward III's army. **Sorrow's faded form**—pale picture of grief and sorrow. **Solitude behind**—leave behind sorrow and solitude.

II (ii). **Mighty victor**—the reference is to Edward III, who was deserted by all his friends when on death-bed. **Grace his obsequies**—show respect at his funeral. **The sable warrior fled**—Black Prince, son of Edward III, who died before his father. He was so called because of his black armour. **Swarm**—Barons or crowd of flatterers. **Noon-tide beam**—glory of power. **Born**—sprang. **Rising morn**—Richard II, who deposed Edward III. **Zephyr**—west wind. **Azure realm**—calm sea. **Gallant trim**—beautifully decorated. **Gilded vessel**—decorated pleasure boat. **Youth on the prow**—the pleasure-seeking instincts of youth guiding his career. **Pleasure at the helm**—prosperity of Richard II on the steering part of the boat. **Whirlwind**—cyclone. **Grim repose**—terribly calm. **That, hush'd in grim.....evening prey**—though the Barons were silent then but they were awaiting the moment of the decline of the reign of Richard II. It has a historical reference. Henry, son of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, who was one of Edward III's sons, was banished by Richard II. In 1399, he came back and got the support of the people, who were tired of the tyranny of Richard. The Parliament deposed Richard and gave the throne to Henry, who was known as Henry III.

II (iii). **Bowl**—cup of wine. **Rich repast**—banquet. **Reft**—deprived of. **He**—Richard II. It is a fine irony which the

starving Richard is represented as dreaming that he is at a banquet. **Regal chair**—chair occupied by the King. **Fell**—cruel. **Famine**—starvation, personification of hunger. **Scowl**—look frowningly. **Baleful**—malicious. **Baffled**—perplexed. **Din of battle**—the ruinous civil wars of York and Lancaster. **Urge**—press on. **Kindred squadrons**—father against son and brother against brother. **Mow**—cut. This reference is to the War of Roses fought between the House of York and Lancaster. The troops of both these Houses belonged to the same nationality. The Yorkists wore “white rose” and the Lancastrians wore “red rose”, as their badge. Hence the struggle is known as the Wars of the Roses. **Ye towers of Julius**—the bards are addressing the towers of London, where Henry VI, George Duke of Clarence, Edward V, Richard, Duke of York were believed to have been murdered secretly. **Consort's faith**—reference to the wife of Henry VI, who is known for her sincerity for her husband. **Father's fame**—reference to Henry V, who conquered France. **Usurper's holy head**—Henry VI. (The bards ask the Tower of London to spare the head of Henry VI). **Snow**—white. **Blushing foe**—‘Red Rose,’ emblem of the Lancastrians, foe to the Yorkists. **Twined**—united. **Bristled boar**—savage boar, the reference is to Richard III. **Infant-gore**—blood of infant children. **Wallows**—rolls on, (the image of the wild boar is carried on). **Thorny shade**—of the symbolic roses. **Brothers**—bards. **Accursed loom**—the fatal web of Edward's race. **Stamp**—imprint. **Ratify**—confirm.

Epode III (i) Edward, lo—address to Edward I. **Consecrate**—make holy. **Half of thy heart**—Eleanor of Castile died a few years after the conquest of Wales. “The heroic proof she gave of her affection for her lord is well-known. The monument of his regret and sorrow for her loss are still to be seen at Northampton.”—(Gray). The lines mean that Bards dedicate to the sudden death of the beloved queen, who is half of thy heart. **The work is done**—winding-sheet of cloth has been prepared. **Stay, O stay**—as the ghosts of the bards began to disappear, the living Bard requests them to stay. **They**—spirits. **Snowdon's height**—of Tudor kings. **Glittering**—sparkling. **Skirts**—borders. **Arthur**—there is a belief among Welsh people that King Arthur is still alive in fairyland and that he would return to reign over Britain. **Bewail**—lament. **Genuine kings**—kings of the really British line, i.e. Tudors and so on. **Like Edward I and his race.**

III (ii). **Girt**—surrounded by. **Starry fronts**—decorated with silver stars. **Dames**—ladies of the Court. **Form divine**—queen Elizabeth I. **Attempted**—in harmony with. **Symphonious**—melodious. **Taliessin**—chief of Welsh bards of the 6th century. **Animate thy clay**—dead bodies. **Rapture**—poetic ecstasy. **Many-coloured wings**—picturesque imagination of poets.

III (iii). **The verse**—the verse of Spenser. **Truth severe**—moral truth. **Fairy Fiction**—theme of “Faerie Queene”: “Fierce wars and faithful loves shall moralise my song”—Spenser. **In buskin’d measures**—the buskin is the high boot worn by the actors in Greek tragedy. Here the reference is to Shakespeare’s romantic tragedies. It means “heavy with tragic vein”. **Pleasing Pain**—tragic comedy. **Tyrant of the throbbing breast**—tragedy makes human heart throb with suspense and horror. **A voice**—of Milton. **Cherub-choir**—a group of singers. **Blooming Eden**—Eden of “Paradise Lost”; breeze coming from the flowery and fragrant garden of Eden. **Distant Warblings**—Milton’s successors. **Fond impious man**—the Bard again turns to Edward I and calls him foolish. **Sanguine**—red. **Orb of day**—Sun. **Different doom**—misery to Edward’s race and triumph to the bards. **Be thine despair and sceptred care**—you are destined to have the worries and the cares that go with kings: “Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.” **He**—the Bard. **Endless night**—eternal darkness of death.

Paraphrase

The poem opens in a dramatic manner. As Edward I and his army are toiling through the mountainous district of Snowdon, the Welsh bard curses the King in the following words :

Strophe —(i) “O merciless King ! May destruction befall on you. May disaster follow you in the battle-field, though, being favoured by conquests, your banners are proudly advancing but they seem to be mocking the air due to the uselessness of glory and conquest, because neither the helmet nor the armour made of closely knit steel rings shall be of any profit in saving your souls from the pricks of conscience and from the curses and the tears of Welsh bards.” Such sounds, that were sounded over the proud helmeted head of Edward I, produced great confusion and when his long army marched along the zigzag steeps, the stout Duke of Gloucester stood dumb and stupefied and Mortimer commanding the men to arm themselves, held his own trembling lance.

(ii) On a rock, the top of which seems to be frowning at the mighty waves of Conway river, there stood the wild-eyed poet, the only saved bard, who was dressed in black mourning gown and had let loose his white hair and beard which were flying in the strong wind like a meteor. The bard struck his lyre with prophetic inspiration and through his skilled fingers played upon it the sad and pathetic notes. He asked King Edward to listen to the curses, which the deserted caves and oak trees, tossing their innumerable branches, were pronouncing upon him, and in a hoarse voice they were murmuring for the vengeance to fall upon him. They were so mournful and sad since Wales lost her independence that they did not respond to the gentle ruler, Llewellyn.

(iii) The bard laments the death of his dead comrades, who have been slaughtered by Edward. Cadwallo whose music had the power to lull the stormy seas, Urien who sang of war, and Modred, whose magic song made the mountains bow down their heads—all these bards are now lying dead besmeared with blood. The ravens and eagles, who feed upon the flesh of dead bodies, are terrified and they remain away from the dead bodies, lying thereabout. The bard, on seeing the dead bards, laments the death of his companions, who are as dear to him as the drops of his own blood. He further feels sorry that after the death of his companions, independence of his nation was lost. Suddenly, he stops his lamentation (when he sees the ghosts of the dead bards). He says that he must not weep any more for his companions who are not really dead. He sees them sitting on the cliffs and finds them still existing in this very world, out to avenge the loss of their independence. These pale figures of the ghosts join him in his curses denouncing death and destruction on Edward and his descendants. They weave a piece of tapestry with their bloody hands (weaving a texture like the witches of Macbeth) and paint the pictures of the misfortune that are to fall on the successors of Edward.

N. B.—Two things are to be noted in this stanza. Firstly, Welsh bards whom the poet is describing lived in the sixth century while Hoel lived in the twelfth century and Llewellyn in the thirteenth. The description here shows that all of them have been slain together on the shores of Menai straits, which is an unfortunate error committed by a professor of History—(Wheeler). Secondly, the web of Fate is woven by the fatal sisters in

Norse mythology and the same kind of belief is found in the Greek mythology in which the Fates, the female deities, did the same thing. But Gray gets the web woven by the male bards and hence Johnson remarks that "theft is always dangerous ; Gray has made weavers of the slaughtered bards by a picture outrageous and incongruous."

Antistrophe—(i) The living bard and the ghosts of the dead bards begin their chorus of curse. They also propose to weave a web of lengthwise and crosswise threads and then to weave a cloth to enclose the corpses of Edward's dynasty. They also suggest to leave a border on which the entire story of Edward's successors may be written in letters burning with the fire of Hell. They also ask to write down the year and also the date on the night of which the Severn shall re-echo the awful shrieks of death (of Edward II) from Berkeley Castle, the shrieks of the King suffering the pain of death. Then they address the thirsty daughter of the French King, who had torn the bowels of her husband brutally, like a wolf, to give birth to a son who would invade her motherland (France). And, this invasion of France would be like a punishment sent from Heaven, and the French army, because of confusion and terror in the midst of which it would run away. And the king, still worse for him, would leave behind him the sad face of the French men.

N. B.—The son of Edward III and Isabella did invade France.

(ii) The bards foretell the miserable death of Edward III, abandoned by his son and even robbed, in his last days, by his courtiers and his mistress. The description gives a graphic picture of the death of the king. The mighty king and conqueror lies on his death-bed and no one is there to show sympathy to him and spare a tear for him. Even his son has abandoned him (he dies earlier than the king). And other courtiers are now paying homage to the new King (Richard II). The morning is bright and cheerful. It means that the reign of Richard is happy and dignified and the courtiers and nobles are performing their everyday routine duties. (Zephyr symbolically standing for flattery). The richly decorated boat sails on with grandeur over the blue waters of the sea. Gray wants to convey that Richard II's rule is passing happily. He is having a nice time, little knowing that difficulties await him

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in the near future. In fact, a cyclone came and Richard II was deprived of his kingship. In a vein of sarcasm, the bards say that let the goblet of wine be filled to its neck and a rich feast arranged. And, they expect the King, Richard II to share the rich feast though he is no longer a king, but a prisoner. And the crude deities of thirst and hunger maliciously frown at him and thus prevent him from touching wine and the food.

(iii) The bards foretell how the gay, pleasure-loving Richard II, will be starved to death. The bards hear the roar of future wars (Wars of the Roses). They also hear the striking of lances and the race of horses in the battle-fields. They foretell that a wide expanse of time (the Wars of the Roses actually lasted for thirteen years), as allotted by Destiny, shall bring ruin and the slaughter of relations and kinsmen. The bards address the Tower of London (supposed to be built by Julius Caesar) which was the royal prison and a place where many brutal murders were committed at midnight, to be considerate to the fond attachment of Margaret to her husband and also to the bravery of her father, Henry V, and, therefore, spare his pious head. On all sides of the web the 'white rose', being the emblem of Yorkists, and the 'red rose', being the emblem of Lancastrians, are represented as united. (This is for two reasons : firstly, because of the marriage between the Yorkist Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville, a Lancastrian lady, and secondly, because of the fighting between the two armies) The brutal and ferocious boar, Richard III, is also seen rolling in the blood of infants. The Bard, then, addresses the ghosts to stamp the doom of Richard III, who died in the Battle of Bosworth.

Epode—(i) The bards suddenly turn back to Edward I and pronounce the doom of his beloved Queen, who is to die a sudden sad death. Now the denunciation is ended and the fatal web is completely woven. The spectres of the dead bards disappear, leaving the surviving bard alone. The Bard, then, sees a rapturous scene of solemn glory relating to the unborn ages. He is enraptured to visualise a line of kings of truly British origin, because of descent from Welsh chieftains.

(ii) The bard gets a vision of the glorious reign of Queen Elizabeth. He visualises the Queen surrounded by beautiful ladies, bold Barons, and old majestic statesmen. Her majestic

manners and inspiring face beautifully harmonise with her maiden grace. How melodious strains float in the atmosphere and the sweet tunes of the magicians are being played by her. He then addresses the great Taliessin, chief of Wales bards, to hear, from his grave, all these musicians, who are singing animated strains to award life to body, because inspired poetry always wakes the heart of man and through the sweet strains which rise above, towards the sky, poetry holds rich images. The reference is to the outburst of lyrical poetry in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

(iii) The bard refers to the revival of poetry in the persons of Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. He also refers to other minor poets of the age. He believes that the race of Edward will perish but the race of the bards shall never die. Poetry will reappear in all its glory. He tells Edward that all his attempts to suppress poetry will prove in vain. Saying these words, the bard jumped down into the water below and ended his life.

Occasion and Subject-matter ? Its Value

As regards the occasion and subject-matter of the Ode, Gray tells us in a brief note : "The following Ode is founded on a tradition current in Wales that Edward I, when he completed the conquest of the country, ordered all the bards that fell into his hands to be put to death."

The conquest of Wales was a great military triumph of Edward I. According to some it was completed nearabout the spring of 1282 or 1283 which should therefore, be taken as the year of the supposed event which is the main topic of the poem.

"Edward I is said to have put the Welsh bards to death because these bards, led by their chief, Llewellyn, the last independent ruler of Wales, sang such noble and patriotic songs as inspired their countrymen to rise up against all attempts of Edward to conquer the country. In the poem the last surviving bard pronounces curses upon Edward I and his descendants, and leaping down a high precipice, kills himself."

The source of the Ode is indicated by the following pre-fatory note added to the "Bard", when it was printed by Horace Walpole in 1757. "The following Ode is founded on a

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tradition current in Wales, that Edward I, when he completed the conquest of that country (*i.e.*, in 1282), ordered all the bards that fell into his hands to be put to death." Gray had become interested in northern mythology as far back as in 1756. The tradition of the massacre of the bards first appeared in the family history of Sir John Wynn of Gwydir, but it was not published before 1773, according to Palgrave. So it is presumed that Gray read about it either in manuscript or from some other sources. Historically this tradition is now definitely believed to be false. Nevertheless it redounds to the credit of Gray for having spun a beautiful dramatic lyric out of the tradition, with its fastidious accuracy of natural descriptions, its imaginative vigour, and above all, its romantic tone and temper. It evinces his great interest in things remote and his abiding sympathy for the poor.

(IV) ODE ON THE SPRING

1

Lo ! where the rosy-bosomed Hours,
Fair Venus' train, appear,
Disclose the long-expecting flowers,
And wake the purple year !
The Attic warble pours her throat,
Responsive to the cuckoo's note.
The Untaught harmony of Spring :
While, whispering pleasure as they fly,
Cool Zephyrs through the clear blue sky
Their gathered fragrance fling.

2

Where'er the oak's thick branches stretch
A broader, browner shade,
Where'er the rude and moss-grown beech
O'er canopies the glade,
Beside some water's rushy brink
With me the Muse shall sit, and think
(At ease reclined in rustic state)
How vain the ardour of the Crowd,
How low, how little are the Proud,
How indigent the Great !

3

Still is the toiling hand of Care ;
The panting herds repose :
Yet hark, how through, the peopled air
The busy murmur glows !
The insect youth are on the wing,
Eager to taste the honied spring
And float amid the liquid noon ;

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 Some lightly o'er the current skim,
 Some show their gaily-gilded trim
 Quick-glancing to the sun.

4

To Contemplation's sober eye
 Such is the race of Man :
 And they that creep, and they that fly,
 Shall end where they began.
 Alike the busy and the gay
 But flutter through life's little day,
 In Fortune's varying colours dressed :
 Brushed by the hand of rough Mischance,
 Or chilled by the Age, their airy dance
 They leave, in dust to rest.

5

Methinks I hear in accents low
 The sportive kind reply :
 Poor moralist ! and what art thou ?
 A solitary fly !
 Thy joys no glittering female meets,
 No hive hast thou of hoarded sweets,
 No painted plumage to display :
 On hasty wings thy youth is flown ;
 The sun is set, thy spring is gone—
 We frolic, while 'tis May.

NOTES

Introduction

At Stoke-Pogis, he wrote this poem. Among the MSS. at Pembroke, there is a copy of this poem in Gray's handwriting entitled "Noon-tide, an Ode". And in the margin of it, there is found this interesting note, "The beginning of June, 174., sent to Fav. : not knowing he was then dead." Favonius was the familiar name of West, his great friend. The death of West pained him very deeply. We are, therefore, not surprised to find 'Ode on the Spring' "lighter in tone, colder in sentiment and more trivial in conception than his other serious productions."

Analysis

There is a perplexing change of tone from the beginning where he was perhaps inspired by that exquisite strain of florid fancy to the stoic moralizings of the later stanzas :

“How vain the ardour of the Crowd,
How low, how little are the Proud,
How indigent the Great.”

The idea contained in the fourth stanza, which is the best one is a commonplace of pseudo-classical meditation, viz., the analogy between insect and human life. It has been expressed by Thomson also in his ‘Season’ in a form far closer to Gray’s presentation of it.

The final stanza with its ‘glittering finale’ and its ‘painted plumage’ is childish in its attempted excess of simplicity, and errs, though in more fantastic language, in a manner as Wordsworth’s “Andrew Jones” erred half a century later. It gives the thought a personal application to Gray as provided for in the second verse.

Criticism

Though the ‘Ode on the Spring’ no longer forms a favourite part of Gray’s poetical works, it possessed considerable significance in 1742 and particularly on account of its forms. This ode was the first note of protest against the hard versification, which had reigned in England for more than seventy years. The Augustan age seems to have suffered from a dullness of ear, which did not permit it to detect a rhyme unless it rang at the close of the very next pause. It was only in rare cases where a lyric movement was employed. The ordinary octosyllabic couplet was employed. But Gray, from the very first returned to a more national form and worked his stanzas on a more harmonic principle. He appeared to have disliked the facility of the couplet. He thought that a poem should have a vertebrate form, which should respond, if not to its subject, at least to its mood. In short, he was a genuine lyricist.

Composition

This Ode begins with a quatrain of the common ballad measures ; an octosyllabic couplet is added, and this would close it with a rustic effect, were the music not prolonged by the addi-

tion of three lines more, while the stanza closes with a short line of six syllables.

Word-meanings and Paraphrase

St. 1. Venus'—spring's. **Long-expecting**—waiting for spring. Mitford says that some editions give 'long-expected'. **The Purple year**—in fact the true purple is remarkably absent from the English spring colouring. Purple is used by the Augustans relying on the authority of Latin poets who used terms of colour with curious vagueness for any bright or strong tint.

"And lavish Nature paints the purple year"—*Pope*.

The Attic warbler—nightingale. Perhaps, Gray had Milton's following line in his mind :

"The Attic Bird trills her thick warbled notes."

Pours her throat—It has been borrowed from Pope—

"Is it for thee the linnet pours her throat ?"

—*Eassy on Man*, iii. 33.

Untaught—natural. **Zephyr**—wind.

St. 2. Glade—open space. **Rushy**—full of reeds. **Rustic state**—the simple luxury of a villager. **How vain the ardour of the Crowd, How low, how little are the Proud**—These lines indicate the insatiability of the worldly grandeur.

St. 3. Still—calm. **Care**—the labourers are at rest. **Peopled air**—full of life. **The honied spring**—balmy air of spring. **Liquid noon**—to swim through the liquid summer. **Trim**—dress.

St. 4. Mischance—misfortune.

St. 5. Sportive kind—insects ; wordly men. **Painted**—coloured. **On hasty.....gone**—the pessimism of youth. **We**—common mortals.

Paraphrase

(i) Gray hails the coming of Spring. With it have come the attendants of Venus, the Goddess of Love and Life. The long-awaited Spring brings with it colourful flowers, the melodious song of the nightingale, the natural but charming notes of the cuckoo, cool and healthy breeze and clear sky. And the whole atmosphere seems to be full of fragrance.

(ii) Describing the scenic beauty further, Gray speaks of thick, broad and brown branches of oak trees and rude (natural) and beautiful open spaces among the beeches, along the side of which flows water with full-grown reeds. Gray thinks of composing a poem in such a calm and quiet atmosphere. He thinks of the insatiability of man's desires of his worldly grandeur.

(iii) The calmness and the quietude of Spring is welcomed by all. The labourers are at rest. The cattle are out to enjoy repose. The insects are full of life. They are out to taste the balmy air of Spring. They swim through the gentle breeze and thin summer. They dance about in many an attire. (Their wings are multi-coloured). In short, everybody is full of life and spirits.

(iv) In this stanza, there is a reflective turn. He talks about the race of Man, who, either in his humble position or in mighty position, has to go where he has come from. Man is like a fly that is roughly brushed away by the hand of mischance. Or, like (airy dance) insects, he is chilled away by age. Whatever the cause may be, Man has ultimately to go to the dust of rest.

N. B.—Critics point out that Gray was indebted for this thought to Thomson's "Seasons".

(v) In this stanza, he further compares the life of Man, and especially his own, to that of a swarm of insects. While the insects, at all events, enjoy their short existence, the poet himself is but a solitary fly, with no lady to love him (because Gray was unmarried when he wrote this poem), no home, and nothing to attract in his position of appearance. His youth is flown. The May time of his life is over. This he illustrates by the setting of the sun and the going away of spring. Surely, the common mortals, whether men or insects, make hay when the sun shines and do not care for what is to come. And, what comes ultimately is the death of all.

(V) ODE ON THE PLEASURE ARISING FROM VICISSITUDE

1

Now the golden morn aloft
 Waves her dew-bespangled wing,
With vermeil cheek and whisper soft
 She woos the tardy spring :
Till April starts, and calls around
The sleeping fragrance from the ground ;
And lightly o'er the living scene
Scatters his freshest, tenderest green.

2

New-born flocks in rustic dance
 Frisking ply their feeble feet.
Forgetful of their wintry trance
 The birds his presence greet.
But chief, the sky-lark warbles high
His trembling thrilling ecstasy
And, less'ning from the dazzled sight,
Melts into air and liquid light

3

Yesterday the sullen year
 Saw the snowy whirlwind fly ;
Mute was the music of the air,
 The herd stood drooping by :
Their raptures now that wildly flow,
No yesterday, nor morrow know ;
'Tis man alone that joy descries
With forward and reverted eyes.

Smiles on past, Misfortune's brow
Soft Reflection's hand can trace,
And o'er the cheek of Sorrow throw
A melancholy grace ;
While Hope prolongs our happier hour,
Or deepest shades, that dimly lour
And blacken round our weary way,
Gilds with a gleam of distant day.

5

Still, where rosy Pleasure leads,
See a kindred grief pursue ;
Behind the steps that Misery treads,
Approaching Comfort view :
The hues of bliss more brightly glow,
Chastised by sabler tints of woe ;
And blended form, with artful strife,
The strength and harmony of life.

6

See the wretch, that long has tossed
On the thorny bed of pain,
At length repair his vigour lost,
And breathe and walk again :
The meanest floweret of the vale,
The simplest note that swells the gale,
The common sun, the air, and skies,
To him are opening Paradise.

NOTES

Introduction

It is an unfinished poem probably written in 1754 or early 1755. After Gray's death, Mason found in his memorandum-book of 1754, a sketch of his design as follows : "Contrast between the winter past and coming spring—Joy owing to that vicissitude—many who never feel that delight—Sloth, Envy, Ambition. How much happier the rustic is, who feels it, though he knows not how."

Analysis

Gray welcomes the coming of the Spring. With the slow-moving rays of the morning sun, the animals are frisking about and birds singing sweetly. Then Gray speaks of the cattle, who did not enjoy a day yesterday, a day of winter, but are very jubilant today, on a spring day. Growing reflective, Gray speaks of man, who has the power of remembering the future ones. He says it is only hope that heals all the wounds of sorrow and prolongs our happy hours. But then grief pursues happiness and there is, in this way a cycle of grief and happiness and happiness and grief. In the last two stanzas, he describes the joy of a convalescent when he gets out of doors again. In the last four lines, he seems to derive pleasure from the objects of Nature—flowers, vales, gales, the sun, the air and the skies.

Critical Appreciation

This poem is a wonderful piece of poetry, clearly speaking of Gray's naturalness, finish, lucidity and clarity. Stopford Brooke's remark that, "All is clear, light in Gray's work" very aptly applies to this poem.

While we contrast the stilted diction, the sing-song rhythm, the ornate rhetorical description of the artificial poets of the eighteenth century, with the simple language, the melody, the joy in Nature unadorned of the second and sixth stanzas, we are reminded of Anderson's fairy story about the real nightingale who sang her own natural and varied song, and the artificial bird who was set all over with diamonds, rubies and sapphires, but who could not sing "according to the barrel." Such music was not heard again in England till Wordsworth, some forty years later, reproduced its tone and even its language in his poem 'To A Skylark' and his 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality'.

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

Word-meanings and Paraphrase

Title. **Vicissitude**—a change of circumstances or fortune.

St. 1. **Golden**—bright. **Aloft**—overhead. **Bespangled**—

spotted. **Vermeil**—bright red, rosy, a Miltonic word. **She**—morning ray. **Tardy**—slow-moving. **Sleeping fragrance**—flowers. **Living**—animating.

St. 2. **Flocks**—animals. **Frisking**—jumping about. **Trance**—exultation. **His**—spring's. **Warbles**—sings sweetly. **Trembling**—vibrating. **Less'ning**—lark goes higher and higher from our sight.

St. 3. **Sullen**—gloomy. **Mute**—silent. **Drooping**—heads hung down. **Descries**—sees. **Reverted**—backward.

St. 4. **Shades**—sorrows. **Lour**—threatens (in some editions, this word is spelt as 'lower'). **Gilds**—covers.

St. 5. **Still**—always. **Chastised**—made chaste. **Sabler**—darker. **Blended**—sorrow and happiness.

St. 6. **Wretch**—Gray himself, who was a patient. **Gale**—gentle breeze.

Paraphrase

(i) Gray welcomes the coming of Spring. With the coming of the slow-moving rays of the sun, the season of Spring (April) starts and calls around sweet fragrance from the flowers lying on the ground. With its coming, Nature appears full of life with fresh and green grass.

(ii) With its coming, the new-born children of animals jump about happily forgetting the exultation they had during winter. The birds too, on the coming of Spring, sing sweet songs, and of them the skylark is more eloquent and melodious. He flies as he sings and flies farther to get out of sight into the thin and clear sky. He is so much lost in ecstasy that he does not know himself that he is going into oblivion.

(iii) Then, the gloomy ideas of winter (which is past now) overtake the poet. He is reminded of the still and quiet Nature during winter. Then everything appeared sad. Even the cattle did not wear a happy look. They passed by with their heads hung down. But today, they are again happy. The animals, Gray says, do not remember their past pleasures nor do they know their present happiness. It is only man, who sees forward and backward. It is only he, who looks before and after.

N. B.—This idea is very much akin to the thought of Shelley, when he says ;

"We look before and after

And pine for what is not."

(iv) When we look back on our past misfortunes and sorrows, we recognise that they were not without their compensations. 'Reflection' is personified here as an artist who makes sorrow look beautiful and misfortune happy. (How Gray has made a 'brow' to smile and 'throw a melancholy grace' over a cheek is something which is difficult to understand). What makes sorrow enduring is Hope. Hope, indeed, prolongs our happiness. Hope, indeed, gilds the deepest shades with a gleam of light in the future. Man has both 'Reflection' and 'Hope' and these are the two instruments that keep man going in the midst of adversity and suffering.

(v) In this stanza Gray says that grief and happiness follow each other in the manner as the rose and thorns follow each other. First the thorns appear on a stem and then follows the rose. Similarly behind the steps of misery follow the steps of comfort. Gray explains this point further. He says that we appreciate our happiness only when we have previous adversity to contrast it with. They (happiness and adversity) give life, its strength and harmony, when combined. It is like a painter, who skilfully contrasts his brighter colours with darker ones and this produces a living picture.

(vi) In this stanza, he speaks of a patient who has recently recovered from long illness and Nature has infused into him life and strength. To him even the smallest flower of a valley, the simple note of gentle breeze and the sun, the air and the skies are objects of delight. In these lines, Gray speaks of the new delight, whereas Wordsworth, in a similar expression given below, speaks of the intimate sympathy with Nature.

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

In these lines, Gray is an anticipator of Wordsworth ; hence this poem is strictly romantic.

(VI) ODE ON A FAVOURITE CAT,
DROWNED IN A TUB OF GOLD FISHES

1

'TWAS on a lofty vase's side,
Where China's gayest art had dyed
The azure flowers, that blow ;
Demurest of the tabby kind,
The pensive Selima reclined,
Gazed on the lake below.

2

Her conscious tail her joy declared ;
The fair round face, the snowy beard,
The velvet of her paws,
Her coat, that with the tortoise vies,
Her ears of jet, and emerald eyes,
She saw ; and purred applause.

3

Still had she gazed ; but 'midst the tide
Two angel forms were seen to glide,
The Genii of the stream :
Their scaly armour's Tyrian hue
Through richest purple to the view
Betrayed a golden gleam.

4

The hapless Nymph with wonder saw :
A whisker first and then a claw,
With many an ardent wish,
She stretched in vain to reach the prize.
What female heart can gold despise ?
What Cat's averse to fish ?

5

Presumptuous Mad ! with looks intent
 Again she stretched, again she bent,
 Nor knew the gulf between.
 (Malignant Fate sat by, and smiled.)
 The slipp'ry verge her feet beguiled,
 She tumbled headlong in.

6

Eight times emerging from the flood
 She mewed to every watery god,
 Some speedy aid to send.
 No Dolphin came, no Nereid stirred :
 Nor cruel *Tom*, nor *Susan* heard.
 A Favourite has no friend !

7

From hence, ye Beauties, undeceived,
 Know, one false step is ne'er retrieved,
 And be with caution bold.
 Not all that tempts your wand'ring eyes
 And heedless hearts, is lawful prize ;
 Nor all that glisters, gold.

NOTES

Introduction

This Ode, next to the "Elegy," is probably the best known of Gray's poems. Gray explains the circumstances of its composition to Walpole in a letter :

"As one ought to be particularly careful to avoid blunders in a compliment of condolence, it would be a sensible satisfaction to me to know for certain who it is I lament. I knew *Zara* and *Selima*, also called *Fatima*, or rather I knew them both together." About the same time, he also wrote to *Wharton* on the uncomm-
 on death of Mr. Walpole's cat, enclosing a copy, which is now in the British Museum. In this MS., Gray called it "on a favourite cat called *Selima* that fell into the china tub with gold fishes in it and was drowned."

The disaster which forms the subject of the Elegy, befell at Walpole's town-house in Arlington Street and years later, after Gray's death. Walpole mounted the vase on a pedestal attaching a label with Gray's first stanza upon it.

Analysis

It was indeed intended to be an Epitaph, but then, it was long for an Epitaph. It is a complete poem, graceful, touching, its rueful truism delicately edged with wit, it reflects a mood which seldom appears in Gray's poetry, though often enough in his letters.

Criticism

Johnson's comment on this poem is more unfortunate than usual. He calls it a 'trifle,' but not a happy trifle. Later critics have been unanimous in thinking it one of the happiest of all trifles. There can be no doubt that in its lightness, it shows that Gray had been reading Gressel and Piron to his advantage.

Word-meanings and Paraphrase

St. 1. Lofty—ornamented. Side—edge. Dyed—imprinted. Azure—sky-blue. Blow—bloom. Demurest—very soft. Tabby—silken. Pensive—thinking. Selima—name of the cat.

St. 2. Conscious tail—as if life is in her tail. Coat—skin. Tortoise vies—dark yellow colour like that of a tortoise. Emerald—green. Purred—in approval of her beauty.

St. 3. Tide—in water. Glide—floating effortlessly in water. Genii—water-nymphs. Tyrian hue—crimson colour.

St. 4. Hapless—unlucky. Averse—oppose.

St. 5. Presumptuous—becoming very bold. Intent—without seeing consequences. Verge—edge.

St. 6. No Dolphin came—it is an allusion to the classical story of the minstrel Orion, who, when he had leaped overboard from a piratical ship, was rescued by a dolphin and carried safe to land. Nereid—water nymph. Tom, nor Susan—names of servants of Walpole.

St. 7. Tempts—strikes.

Paraphrase

Gray, in this poem, shows himself as a poet of urbane society. There is an echo of 'The Rape of the Lock,' employing mock-heroic style—written in a half serious and half-comic tone. The occasion was that Mr. Walpole, Gray's friend, had lost a cat which was drowned in a tub full of water.

St. 1. An ornamental vase, on which was imprinted the Chinese beautiful art in the sky-blue colour, was there and along its side a spotted, very soft, brooding cat, named Selima, slipped into the lake below.

St. 2. It was a beautiful cat. It had a tail, it had fair colour, round face and snowy beard. She had soft skin of the darkest yellow colour. Her ears were of jet and eyes green. She looked disturbed but proud of her beauty.

St. 3. As she looked, there arose a tide in the water and it appeared as if two water nymphs, of crimson colour, arose out of water.

St. 4. The unlucky nymph looked with surprise, at this beautiful cat, who had whiskers and claws. This nymph wanted to catch hold of this prey, but it was in vain. The cat in fact looked like a beautiful fish of gold, which the nymph wanted to take possession of. (In this stanza, there is a satire on the society of the eighteenth century, for it shows how women had love for gaiety and affectation).

St. 5. The cat became very bold and without caring for the consequences, she made one more attempt to come out of the water. But she never knew the gulf between her and the shore of the lake. Once again, she made an attempt and once again her feet slipped, tumbling herself down. (The description is indeed dramatic).

St. 6. The cat made eight attempts to come out. Failing at these, she made a prayer to the God of water, Neptune, to send her some aid. But to her aid came none, not even Tom and Susan who were Walpole's servants. Gray adds to say that the cat had no friend.

N.B.—This is a good piece of the mock-heroic style. (There is a belief that cats have as many as nine lives).

St. 7. In this stanza, Gray is sermonising. He says, 'You beautiful creatures, wake up, realize and not to work under illu-

sion. He says that all the beautiful creatures, whether human or animal should not be led away by what glitters. It is not always gold that glitters. Another note of lesson is that a wrong step once taken can never be retraced.

Opinion

“The poem on the cat was doubtless by its author considered as a ‘trifle,’ but it is not a happy trifle. In the first stanza, the azure flowers that blow, show resolutely that a rhyme is sometimes made when it cannot easily be found. Selima, the cat, is called a nymph with some violence both to language and sense, but there is good use made of it when it is done, for of the two lines—

What female heart can gold despise ?
What cat’s averse to fish ?

The first relates surely to the nymph and the second only to the cat. The sixth stanza contains a melancholy truth, that a favourite has no friend, but the last ends in a pointed sentence of no relation to the purpose, if what glistered had been gold, the cat would not have gone into the water, and if she had, would not less have been drowned.”

—Johnson.

(VII) ODE FOR MUSIC

AIR

"HENCE, avaunt, (its holy ground)
"Comus, and his midnight crew,
"And ignorance with looks profound,
"And dreaming sloth of pallid hue,
"Mad sedition's cry profane, 5
"Servitude that hugs her chain,
"Nor in these consecrated bowers
"Let painted flattery hide her serpent-train in
flowers."

CHORUS

"Nor Eny base, nor creeping Gain
"Dare the Muse's walk to stain, 10
"While bright-eyed science watches round :
"Hence, away, 'tis holy Ground !"

RECITATIVE

From yonder realms of empyrean day
Bursts on my ear th' indignant lay :
There sit the sainted Sage, the Bard divine, 15
The Few, whom genius gave to shine
Through every unborn age and undiscovered
clime.
Rapt in celestial transport they,
Yet hither oft a glance from high
They send of tender sympathy 20
To bless the place, where on their opening Soul
First the genuine ardor stole.
It was Milton struck the deep-toned shell,
And, as the choral warblings round him swell,
Meek Newton's self bends from his state sublime,
And nods his hoary head, and listens to the 25
rhyme.

AIR

"Ye brown over-arching Groves,
 "That contemplation loves,
 "Where willowy Comus lingers with delight !
 "Oft at the blush of dawn 30
 "I trod level lawn,
 "Oft woo'd the gleam of Cynthia silver-bright
 "In cloisters dim, far from the haunts of Folly,
 "With freedom by my side, and soft-eyed
 Melancholy."

RECITATIVE

But hark ! the Portal's sound, and pacing forth 35
 With solemn steps and slow
 High Potentates and Dames of royal birth
 And mitred fathers in long order go :
 Great Edward with the lillies on his brow
 From haughty gallia torn, 40
 And sad chatillon, on her bridal morn
 That wept her bleeding Love, and princely clare.
 And Anjou's Heroine, and the paler Rose.
 The rival of her crown, and of her woes,
 And either Henry there, 45
 The murther'd Saint, and the majestic Lord,
 That broke the bonds of Rome.
 (Their tears, their little triumphs o'er,
 Their human passions now no more,
 Save charity' that glows beyond the tomb) 50
 All that on Granta's fruitful plain
 Rich streams of regal bounty pour'd,
 And had these awful fanes and turrets rise,
 To hail their Fitzroy's festal morning come :
 And thus they speak in soft accord 55
 The liquid language of the skies.

QUARTETTO

"What is Grandeur, what is Power ?
 "Heavier Toil, superior pain,
 "What the bright reward we gain ?
 "The grateful memory of the good. 60

"Sweet is the breath of vernal shower,
 "The bee's collected treasures sweet,
 "Sweet music's melting fall, but sweeter yet
 "The still small voice of Gratitude."

RECITATIVE

Foremost and learning from her golden cloud 65
 The Venerable Margaret see !
 "Welcome, my noble Son," (she cries aloud),
 "To this, thy kindred train, and me :
 "Pleased in thy lineaments we trace
 "A Tudor's fire, a Beaufort's grace." 70

AIR

"Thy liberal heart, thy judging eye
 "The flower unheeded shall descry,
 "And bid it round heaven's altars shed
 "The fragrance of its blushing head :
 "Shall raise from earth the latent gem 75
 "To glitter on the diadem."

RECITATIVE

"Lo, Granta waits to lead her blooming band,
 "Not obvious, obtrusive, she
 "No vulgar praise, no venal incense flings :
 "Nor dares with country tongue refined, 80
 "Profane thy inborn loyalty of mind :
 "She reveres herself and thee.
 "With modest pride to grace thy youthful brow
 "The Laureate wreath, the Cecil wore she brings,
 "And to thy just, thy gentle hand 85
 "Submits the fasces of her sway,
 "While spirits blest above and Men below
 "Join with glad voice the loud symphonious lay."

GRAND CHORUS

"Thro' the wild waves as they roar
 "With watchful eye and dauntless mien
 "Thy steady course of honor keep,

“Nor fear the rocks, nor seek the shore :
“The stars of Brunswick smile serene,
“And gilds the horrors of the deep.”

NOTES

Introduction

This Ode was performed in the Senate House at Cambridge in 1769, at the installation of his Grace Augustus Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Grafton, Chancellor of the University. It was printed for the University under the title of Ode and without its author's name. The Duke of Grafton had, as Prime Minister, the year before, conferred on Gray the professorship of Modern History and Gray wrote this in grateful acknowledgment.

Analysis

The Ode opens with a solo (a musical piece of a single voice) and chorus demanding the expulsion of every form of vice and ignorance from the holy ground of Cambridge. From the first Recitative, we learn that the singers were the sages and poets who owed their inspiration to that University, and particularly to Milton and Newton. Milton himself, in one of his measures, sings of his love for Cambridge, while Newton listens.

Then follows the commemoration of Royal Benefactors of the University, who are described as coming in procession to hail the new Chancellor. One of them, Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby, the mother of Henry VIII, welcomes the Duke, her descendant with a flattering song. Then the University authorities present a dignified address and bestow on the Duke the honour of the Chancellorship, which had once been held by William Cecil, afterwards Lord Burleigh. Finally a grand chorus of Spirits above and men below expresses a hope that the Chancellor will rule with courage and moderation, and concludes with a loyal tribute to the king.

Critical Appreciation

Verses written to grace some great occasion, a royal birthday, a marriage, a funeral or an installation, as is the case here—seldom attain high poetic excellence. The reason is that

they are written to order. Surely, to be asked to write anything, even an epitaph for a friend, seemed to paralyse Gray's powers. Therefore, this poem is somewhat of less poetic merit than other odes by Gray. Yet, it is so good. To realize its excellence, we should read some of the effusions of servile flattery, conventional language and commonplace imagery that even good poets thought it no shame to offer to their sovereigns or their patrons during the 17th and 18th centuries. Gray's Poem is dignified. The poem is well proportioned. Though there are notes of unreal personifications, we cannot fail to recognise the voice of a true poet. These lines speak of the exquisite beauty—

“Their tears, their triumphs o’er,
Their human passions now no more.”

Construction

It has not been written in the Pindaric manner. It is irregular in construction. It is full of abstractions and personifications.

Analysis

Lines 1-17 : A choir is heard from heavens above. There the great men of old who seem to bid that their holy place (Cambridge) be left unprofound.

Lines 18-34 : Milton sings the praises of Cambridge. Newton listens.

Lines 57-64 : Benefactors pass out on a procession from the portals of heaven to give an ovation to the new Chancellor.

Lines 65-70 : His ancestress, Margaret Tudor, sings his praise.

Lines 89-94 : And is joined by the heavenly choir of singers.

Word-Meanings and Paraphrase

Air (Lines 1-8). **Avaunt**—move on ; run away. **Comus**—Personification of revelry and vice. **Profound**—wise. **Sloth**—indolence. **Pallid**—pale. **Sedition**—agitation. **Profane**—irrelevant. **Servitude**—slavery. **Hugs**—takes pride in. **Consecrated**—sacred. **Painted**—beautiful.

Chorus (Lines 9-12). **Creeping**—advancing in a stealthy way. **Science**—learning.

Recitative (Lines 13-26). **Empyrean**—heavenly. **Th'indignant lay**—the 'few' men of genius produced by Cambridge whose works will be immortal and will be read in countries not yet discovered, are indignant that the University where they first felt the enthusiasm of learning should be disgraced by noisy revellers and by ignorant, lazy, envious and greedy students. **Stole**—came gradually. **Shell**—lyre. **Meek**—submissive. **Hoary head**—Newton lived up to the age of 86 years.

Air (Lines 27-34). **Comus**—the river Cam. **Cynthia**—the moon.

Recitative (Lines 35-56). **High Potentates**—nobles. **Mitred**—with a bishop's cap. Edward III, founder of the Trinity College, who added the 'fleur-de-lys' (lily flowers) of France to the arms of England. **Chatillon**—she was the founder of Pembroke College. **Clare**—Elizabeth de Burg, Countess of Clare, was the wife of John de Burg. She founded Clare Hall. **Anjou's Heroien**—Margaret of Anjou, wife of Henry VI, who founded Queen's College. **Rose**—Elizabeth Woodville, wife of Edward IV, who added to that foundation. **Henry**—Henry the Sixth and Eighth. The former founded the King's College and the latter was the greatest benefactor of Trinity College. **Granta's**—Cambridge. **Fitzroy's**—Duke of Grafton, who, as Prime Minister has given to Gray the post of a professor of Modern History at Cambridge in 1768.

Recitative (Lines 65-70). **Lineaments**—features. **A Tudor's fire, a Beaufort's grace**—the Countess was a Beaufort and was married to a Tudor, hence this line has been applied to the Duke of Grafton, who claims descent from both the families.

Air (Lines 71-76). **Diadem**—a badge of sovereignty.

Recitative (Lines 77-88). **Youthful-brow**—the Duke is 34 years of age. **Cecil**—Lord Treasurer Burleigh was Chancellor of the University in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. **Fasces**—symbol of authority.

Grand Chorus (Lines 89-94). **Brunswick**—a Duke of Brunswick became Elector of Hanover and from him our present dynasty is descended.

Paraphrase

(Lines 1-12). The Ode opens with a solo and a chorus demanding the expulsion of every form of vice and ignorance from the holy ground of Cambridge. The poet asked ignorance (may it be wise), sloth, sedition and servitude to run away from the sacred bowers of the Cambridge University. He asks Flattery, which is represented here as a woman with human face and a tail of the serpent, to hide her tail in the flowers. The poet also asks Envy and Gain not to stain the Muse, on a ground where learning has its sway.

(Lines 13-26). The 'few' men of genius produced by Cambridge whose works are immortal and are read in countries not yet discovered are indignant that the University where they felt the enthusiasm of learning should be disgraced by noisy revellers and by ingorant, lazy, envious and greedy students. We further learn that these very 'few' have owed their inspiration to that University. Of these 'few,' Milton and Newton are the important students. Milton in one of his own measures sings of his love for Cambridge (Milton was in Cambridge in 1632) and Newton with his hoary head (for he was 86 years of age) listens quietly to the strain of Milton.

(Lines 27-34). This is what Milton sings. He addresses the shady groves of Cambridge, which provide a calm atmosphere for contemplative moods. He also speaks of the Camus river which flows with delight. Often he (Milton) walks about the lawn in the flush of dawn and often he enjoys the evening beauty in the bright light of the moon.

N. B.—The stanza, being supposed to be sung by Milton is very judiciously written in the metre which he fixed upon for the stanza of his Christmas hymn, "It was in the winter wild"—Mason. Dr. Bradshaw in his notes on this song has given a list of passages in Milton's poems which Gray seems to have had in his mind when he wrote this imitation. We quote this list in order that the student may be able to follow Gray's method of building up this curious mosaic of Miltonic words, thoughts and style. "*Il Penseroso*," Lines 54-62 ; 131-134 ; 155-156 ; *Comus*, Lines 223-890 ; *Lycidas*, 103, and also 25-26 ; *Paradise Lost*, XI, 185, *Christmas Hymn*, Line 85.

(Lines 35-56). Then follows the commemoration of Royal Benefactors of the University who are described as coming in

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a procession to hail the new Chancellor. The poet asks us to look at the gate, which has opened and through which are seen coming, with solemn and slow steps, high and royal nobles and dames. They wear a bishop's cap. First of all, comes Edward III, the founder of the Trinity College. Then follows sad Chatillon, Countess of Pembroke and daughter of Guy de Chatillon (of whom tradition says that her husband was slain at a tournament on the day of his nuptials). She was the founder of Pembroke College. After her comes Countess of Clare who founded Clare Hall. Then come Margaret of Anjou, wife of Henry VI, foundress of Queen's College and Elizabeth Woodville, wife of Edward IV (she was the rival of Margaret of Anjou, as she was a Yorkist and so wore the 'white rose' as a badge). Then come Henry VI and Henry VIII, the former is the founder of King's College and the latter the greatest benefactor to Trinity College). These majestic lords have broken the bonds of Rome, — (Pope). All these benefactors have come to hail Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Grafton, at his installation as the Chancellor of the University. And all these welcome him in a low tone and soft accord.

(Lines 57-64). It is a musical composition depicting the glory of the University. The University has great grandeur, and it has great power. The more one works, the harder one works, the greater reward one has. The University is a store of rich treasure and one is only indebted to it.

(Lines 65-70). The procession still continues. Foremost comes respected Margaret, mother of Henry VII, in her golden dress. She welcomes Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Grafton, to this historic University. (Fitzroy claimed descent from Margaret because she married a Tudor ; so she called Fitzroy as her son).

Lines (71-76). In these lines, Gray expresses a hope that the Duke will dispense with judgment, his patronage in Church and State and his discriminating eye will find out men of genius who would otherwise be unknown and will raise them to places of honour.

(Lines 77-88). The University authorities present a dignified address and bestow on the Duke the honour of the Chancellorship, which had once been held by William Cecil, who was later called Lord Burleigh. The University is not coming forward nor is it thrusting herself forward to confer the Chan-

cellorship on Fitzroy. The idea is that the celebration has its dignity. There is no hurry about it. No songs of flattery or greedy gains are being sung. In fact, the University has felt itself honoured in honouring Fitzroy, who was a young man of 34 years. Fitzroy occupies a place which was once held by William Cecil. This honour to Fitzroy has been joyously received by the Heavens above and men on the earth below. Indeed the appointment of Fitzroy as the Chancellor of the University was universally applauded.

(Lines 89-94). This chorus has been sung by the spirits above and men below. There is a hope that the new Chancellor will rule with courage and moderation. He will, with his watchful eye and fearless appearance (boldness), steer through the stately ship of the University and as a pilot keep its honour safe and high. In the last two lines, Gray has a double meaning to convey. In the first instance it is a compliment to the King and in the second, to the Duke of Brunswick, who became Elector of Hanover. The star that guides the royal master is in the ascendant and shines brightly to guide the new Chancellor in steering the ship through political troubles.

(VIII) ODE ON THE FATAL SISTERS

I

Now the storm begins to lower
(Haste, the loom of Hell prepare,)
Iron-sleet of arrowy shower
Hurtles in the darken'd air.

II

Glitt'ring lances are the loom, 5
Where the dusky warp we strain,
Weaving many a Soldier's doom,
Orkney's woe, and Randver's bane.

III

See the griesly texture grow ! 10
('Tis of human entrails-made)
And the weights that play below,
Each a gasping Warrior's head.

IV

Shafts for shuttles, dipt in gore,
Shoot the trembling cords along. 15
Sword, that once a Monarch bore,
Keep the tissue close and strong.

V

Mista black, terrific Maid
Sangrida, and Hilda see,
Join the wayward work to aid : 20
'Tis the wood of victory.

VI

Ere the ruddy sun be set,
Pikes must shiver, javelins sing,
Blade with clattering buckler meet,
Hauberk crash, and helmet ring.

VII

(Weave the crimson web of war) 25
Let us go, and let us fly,
Where our Friends the conflict share,
Where they triumph, where they die.

VIII

As the paths of fate we tread, 30
Wading through th' ensanguin'd field,
Gondula, and Geira, spread
O'er the youthful King your shield.

IX

We the reins to slaughter give
Ours to kill, and ours to spare ;
Spite of danger he shall live. 35
(Weave the crimson web of war.)

X

They, whom once the desert-beach
Pent within its bleak domain,
Soon their ample sway shall stretch
O'er the plenty of the plain. 40

XI

Low the dauntless Earl is laid,
Gor'd with many a gaping wound :
Fate demands a nobler head ;
Soon a King shall bite the ground.

XII

Long his loss shall Eirin weep, 45
Ne'er again his likeness see ;
Long her strains in sorrow steep :
Strains of Immortality !

XIII

Horror covers all the health,
Clouds of carnage blot the sun. 50
Sisters, weave the web of death ;
Sisters, cease, the work is done.

XIV

Hail the task, and hail the hands !
Songs of joy and triumph sing : 55
Joy to the victorious bands ;
Triumph to the younger King.

XV

Mortal, thou that hear'st the tale,
Learn the tenour of our song.
Scotland, thro' each winding vale 60
Far and wide the notes prolong.

XVI

Sisters, hence with spurs of speed :
Each her thundering faulchion wield ;
Each bestride her sable steed,
Hurry, hurry to the field.

NOTES

Introduction

This Ode, written in the year 1761, is a paraphrase of an Icelandic poem written about 1029, referring to the battle of Cloutarf, fought on Good Friday, 1014, when Brian, King of Dublin, was slain, and Sigurd, Earl of the Orkney-islands, who had gone to Ireland with his fleet and army to assist 'Sictrygg' with the silken beard against Brian, perished with all his forces.

There is a good deal of dispute among commentators whether Gray's poem is a paraphrase of the original Icelandic poem or of a Latin version made in the seventeenth century.

The Fatal Sisters are the Valkyries or, as Gray calls them,

the Valkyriur, "female divinities, servants of Odin in the Gothic mythology. Their name signifies choosers of the slain. They were mounted on swift horses, with drawn swords in their hands ; and in the throng of battle selected such as were destined to slaughter, and conducted them to Valhalla, the hall of Odin, or Paradise of the Brave ; where they attended the banquet and served the departed heroes with horns of mead and ale."

"On the day of the battle," says Gray, "a native of Caithness, in Scotland, saw at distance a number of persons on horseback riding at a full speed towards a hill and seeming to enter into it. Curiosity led him to follow them, till looking through an opening in the rocks, he saw twelve gigantic figures resembling women ; they were all employed about a loom ; and as they wove, they sang the following dreadful song ; which, when they had finished, they tore the web into twelve pieces, and, each taking her portion, galloped off, six of them to the north and as many to the south."

Analysis

While the storm of battle is in progress the weird sisters are weaving the fatal web of which the threads are the lives of men. Now they seem to be seated at the dreadful loom, now wading through the field of blood directing the slaughter. We see the bloodstained shuttle moving in and out among the upright strings, each of which is kept in position by a ghastly weight. We hear the clashes of weapons and through all the monotonous terrible incantation. Now the dauntless Earl of Orkney is slain. Soon a nobler victim, King Brian of Ireland, will "bite the ground". Victory falls to the "younger king", Sictrygg, who has been protected by the shields of the Valkyries.

Critical Appreciation

It is a monologue, sung by one of the Valkyriur or chooser of the slain to her three sisters ; the measure is, indeed, one of great force and fire. Further, this poem speaks of Gray's medieval romanticism. Quoting two lines from this poem of Gray.

"As the paths of fate we tread
Wading through the ensanguined field."

Mr. Tovey calls attention to the semi-classical and conventional character of these lines and, no doubt, his description is just. According to Tovey, Gray's diction, in this poem, is redolent of pseudo-classicism. No attempt has been made by Gray to procure a real simplicity and poignancy. Differing with Tovey, Phelps considers this work as "strictly romantic".

Gray was a complete success at this poem. What gave credit to him, in this poem, is the conjured atmosphere of darkness and doom of battles on desolate moors and spirits in the mist, which was the essence of Northern Romanticism.

Construction

Metre. The ordinary four-foot iambic metre with alternate rhymes is altered by making the first foot of each line heavily monosyllabic—

"Weave the crimson web of war."

The effect of this repeated line after line with monotonous iteration is to send the verses along with a swift crash of sound that admirably brings out the horror of inevitable Fate. It is significant to note that this is the metre of the witches' incantation in *Macbeth*. It is interesting to notice Gray's method in constructing this poem.

Word-Meanings and Paraphrase

Hurtles—pushes forcibly. **Strain**—stretch lightly. **Weights**—weights attached to the threads. **Play**—move freely. **Warrior's head**—the web of Destiny is woven with human entrails and weighted with human heads. **Gore**—blood. **Pikes**—lances. **Javeline**—spear. **Buckler**—shield. **Ensanguin'd**—bloody. **Give**—let loose. **Pent**—closed. **Dauntless Earl**—Sigurd. **Eirin**—Ireland. **Tenour**—purport. **Faulchion**—a short bent sword.

Preface

It will be helpful if we go through this Preface. In the eleventh century Sigurd, Earl of the Orkney islands, went with a fleet of ships and a considerable body of troops into Ireland, to the assistance of Sictrygg with the silken beard, who was then making war on his father-in-law, Brian, King of Dublin: the Earl and all his forces were cut to pieces, and Sictrygg was in danger of a total defeat, but the enemy had a

greater loss by the death of Brian, their king, who fell in the action. On Christmas-day, the day of the battle, a native of Caithness, in Scotland, saw at a distance a number of persons on horseback riding at full speed towards a hill and seeming to enter into it. Curiosity led him to follow them, till looking through an opening in the rocks, he saw twelve gigantic figures resembling women; they were all employed about a loom; and as they wove, they sang the following dreadful song, which when they had finished, they tore the web into twelve pieces and (each taking her portion) galloped—six to the north and as many to the south.

Paraphrase

St. 1. Now while the storm of battle is in full swing, come in haste and prepare the loom of the lives of the heroes. The battle is raging so fiercely that the arrows of steel shot across the field have made a dark roof over the whole place and shaded the atmosphere.

St. 2. The dazzling spears make the loom, making it move with laboured strain. The fatal sisters (ghastly women) of human fate are weaving the loom of human life and destiny. This loom is weaving the destruction of the forces of Orkney and Randver.

St. 3. See the web of destiny being prepared. It is stretched by the human entrails (used for threads) and weighted on the edge with severed human heads of the warriors fighting on the battle field.

St. 4. The shuttles are made of blood-stained shafts moving fast across the loom. The swords of kings and emperors are used to lighten up the tissues.

St. 5. The weaving of this horrid web, the dark-complexioned Mista, the terrific goddess, and Langrida and Hilda join together and assist in the completion of the web. It is the fatal loom of destiny over the battle-field.

St. 6. Before the sun sets, lances and spears must move fast across the field; swords must strike against the shields, and hauberks and helmets must clash with each other.

St. 7. Let us complete the bloody web and send it to the battle-field and possess it. There on the battle-field our

own heroes are fighting; whether they win or lose and die, they are all our own.

St. 8. As the web of destiny is spread over them, the fatal sisters wade through blood across the battle-field. Gondula and Geira spread their shield over the head of the young king (Sictrygg), meaning to protect him.

St. 9. These fatal sisters (the goddesses of fate) hold the reins of life and death. It is for them to choose whom to kill and whom to spare. In spite of all the dangers of war, one spared by them will live. Thus, they weave the blood web of war.

St. 10. The fatal sisters decide that the tribe that had hitherto been confined to the sea-coast in a kind of deserted region, shall henceforth rule over the rich provinces in the interior of Ireland.

St. 11. Soon after this decision is taken, the Earl of Orkney drops down dead, with streams of blood flowing out from his wide and deep wounds. The fatal sisters also demand the death of a nobler hero, the king Brian, who soon lies dead on the battle-field.

St. 12. Ireland will mourn the death of king Brian for a long time because she is not going to have again a king like him. The strains of mourning over the death of the king will last to the end.

St. 13. Clouds of horror are cast over all the living hosts on the battle-field. Clouds of blood float over the battle-field. The fatal sisters thus weave the web of death, and then they pause for breath for their work is done.

St. 14. Hail, the task of weaving the web is over, and hail to the hands that wove it. Let there be joy amongst the victorious forces and Victory over the head of the young king Sictrygg.

St. 15. Let the human beings who hear this song learn that the strain of the song of the fatal sisters was the death of the king Brian. Let this song be echoed far and wide through all the hills and valleys of Scotland.

St. 16. Having thus completed their horrid task, they weave their thundering swords and fly away. Each of them flies on a dark horse, with lightning speed, and comes to the battle field to take away the heroes slain there.

(IX) ODE ON THE DESCENT OF ODIN

(From *The Norse Tongue*)

UPROSE the King of Men with speed,
And saddled strait his coal-black steed ;
Down the yawning steep he rode,
That leads to HELA'S drear abode.
Him the Dog of Darkness spied, 5
His shaggy throat he open'd wide,
While from his jaws, with carnage fill'd,
Foam and human gore distill'd :
Hoarse he bays with hideous din,
Eyes that glow, and fangs, that grin ; 10
And long pursues, with fruitless yell,
The Father of the powerful spell.
Onward still his way he takes
(The groaning earth beneath him shakes)
Till full before his fearless eyes 15
The portals nine of hell arise.

Right against the eastern gate,
By the moss-grown pile he sate ;
Where long of yore to sleep was laid
The dust of the prophetic Maid. 20
Facing to the northern clime,
Thrice he traced the runic rhyme ;
Thrice pronounc'd, in accents dread,
The thrilling verse that wakes the Dead :
Till from out the hollow ground 25
Slowly breath'd a sullen sound.

Pr. What call unknown, what charms presume
To braid the quiet of the tomb ?
Who thus afflicts my troubled sprite,
And drags me from the realms of night ? 30
Long on these mould'ring bones have beat
The winter's snow, the summer's heat,
The drenching dews, and driving rain,
Let me, let me sleep again.

Who is he, with voice unblest,
That calls me from the bed of rest ?

35

O. A Traveller, to thee unknown,
Is he that calls, a Warrior's Son.
Thou the deeds of light shall know ;
Tell me what is done below,
For whom yon glitt'ring board is spread,
Drest for whom yon golden bed.

40

Pr. Mantling in the goblet see
The pure bev'rage of the bee,
O'er it hangs the shield of gold ;
'Tis the drink of Balder bold ;
Balder's head to death is giv'n.
Pain can reach the Sons of Heav'n !
Unwilling I my lips uncloze :
Leave me, leave me to repose.

50

O. Once again my call obey,
Prophetess, arise, and say,
What dangers Odin's Child await,
Who the Author of his fate.

Pr. In Hoder's hand the Heree's doom :
His Brother sends him to the tomb.
Now my weary lips I close ;
Leave me, leave me to repose.

55

O. Prophetess, my spell obey,
Once again arise, and say,
Who th' Avenger of his guilt,
By whom shall Hoder's blood be spilt.

60

Pr. In the caverns of the west,
By Odin's fierce embrace comprest,
A wond'rous Boy shall Rinda bear,
Who ne'er shall comb his raven-hair,
Nor wash his visage in the stream,
Nor see the sun's departing beam,
Till he on Hoder's corse shall smile
Flaming on the fun'ral pile.
Now my weary lips I close :
Leave me, leave me to repose.

65

70

O. Yet awhile my call obey ;
Prophetess, awake, and say,

What Virgins these, in speechless woe,
That bend to earth their solemn brow,
That their flaxen tresses tear,
And snowy veils, that float in air.
Tell me, whence their sorrows rose :
Then I leave thee to repose. 75 80

Pr. Ha ! no Traveller art thou,
King of Men, I know thee now ;
Mightiest of a mighty line—

O. No boding Maid of skill divine
Art thou, nor Prophetess of good ;
But Mother of the giant-brood. 85

Pr. Hie thee hence, and boast at home,
That never shall Enquirer come
To break my iron-sleep again,
Till Lok has burst his tenfold chain ;
Never, till substantial Night
Has reassum'd her ancient right ;
Till wrapt in flames in ruin hurl'd,
Sinks the fabric of the world. 90

NOTES

Introduction

Gray makes no special mention of this poem. It is reasonable to suppose it to have been written about 1761, and published in 1768. Gray has followed the Latin version of Bartholin fairly accurately though with some lamentable lapses into purest pseudo classicism. The story, however, runs as under :—Balder, a son of Odin, learnt from a dream that he was near his death and persuaded the gods to save him. Through the goddess, Frigga, they made every object swear not to harm him, except the Mistletoe, with a branch of which the blind Hoder guided by Lok (see note on Lok) gave Balder his death-blow. After all precautions had been taken through Frigga, Odin, still anxious, went off to consult the prophetess. This consultation is the subject of this poem.

Analysis

Odin, the supreme god in the Northern mythology visits the abode of the dead over which the goddess Hela presides,

to enquire whether his son Balder, was doomed to die (as had been predicted) and, if so, by whose hand he was to fall. Arrived at the gate, he calls back to life the spirit of prophetess, who tells him that even the children of the gods can die and that the banquet-table, the goblet of foaming mead and the golden couch which he sees, are for Balder, and that he will be slain by his brother, Hoder. She is unwilling to be awakened and to speak ; four times has Odin to recall her by his spell from the sleep of death. Finally, she tells him that Balder will be avenged by a third son of Odin not yet born. Then come the Fates—Spirits representing the past, the present and the future. Although Odin does not recognise them, he can see them and thus betrays the prophetess that he is no mortal traveller, but a god. Odin, in anger, declares that the seeress is not the good spirit he has called up, but the wicked Angerabode, the mother of the wolf Fenris, the great serpent of Midgard and Hela (Mason). She then retorts that never again will she submit to be disturbed till the evil spirit, Lok, destroys Heaven and Earth and men and gods alike and Night once more reigns supreme.

N. B.—Gray's poem is obscure because he omits the first part of the story. Balder had dreams that his life was in peril. To avert the danger, the gods sent Frea, the mother of the gods, to exact an oath from fire and water, from iron and all other metals, as well as from stones, earths, diseases, beasts, birds, poisons and creeping things that none of these would do any harm to Balder. When this was done, it became a favourite pastime of the gods to throw darts or stones at Balder or to hew him with their swords and battle-axes, for do what they would, none of them could harm him. But Lok found out that the little shrub called Mistletoe had not taken the oath, so he cut off a piece of Mistletoe and repaired to the place where the gods were assembled. Going up to Hoder, he said, "Why dost you not also throw something at Balder ?" "Because I am blind," answered Hoder, "and see not where Balder is, and have moreover, nothing to throw with." "Come," said Lok, "do like the rest : throw this twig at him and I will direct thy arm." So Hoder took the Mistletoe, and under the guidance of Lok, darted it at Balder, who, pierced through and through, fell down lifeless.—Adapted from Matthew Arnold's rendering of the Edda in his note on Balder Dead.

Critical Appreciation

Gray is superb in his Pindaric Odes. He is uncompromisingly classical in form and uncompromisingly learned in content and form. His poems from the Norse were also a great success, though obscure and allusive at places. He has, for these poems, depended largely on the Latin translations, as Gray knew very little of Welsh language. What has given credit to Gray, in these poems, is the conjured atmosphere of darkness and doom, of battles on desolate moors and spirits in the mist, which is the essence of Northern Romanticism.

Word-meanings and Paraphrase

Hela's drear abode—Goddess of death. In the Edda, she is described as one having dreadful countenance and her body, half flesh colour and half blue—(Gray). A queen over all the dead. **The Dog of Darkness**—by name Managarmar fed upon the lives of those about to die. The idea of a dog guarding the approach to lower world is common to the Norse and Greek mythology. Cf. the three-headed Cerberus of the Greek mythology. **Fruitless**—powerless to harm while under Odin's spell. **Nine of hell**—a belief that hell has nine worlds. **Presume**—venture. **Mantling**—covered with foam. **Bev'rage**—honey; mead. **Flaxen**—as light as flax. **Mother of the giant brood**—mother of the wolf-serpent. **Hela. Lok**—Lok is the Evil Being, who continues in chains till the twilight of the Gods approaches, when he shall break his bonds, the human race, the stars and the sun shall disappear. The earth shall sink in the seas, the fire consume the skies, and even Odin himself and his kindred deities shall perish.

Paraphrase

Lines 1 to 25. Odin, the king of men, visits the abode of the dead, which is presided over by Hela, goddess of Death. As he goes, he looks ferocious—his throat being shaggy, jaws filled with carnage, human blood distilling from his mouth, voice being hoarse and eyes glowing, and wherever he happens to move, everyone grows powerless under his spell. And, he continues to ride until he reaches the portals of Hell (Hells is supposed to have nine worlds). He enters through the eastern gate

by the side of a mossy grave, under which lay a prophetess. Facing this grave, he writes thrice and pronounces thrice to wake up the dead prophetess, who slowly speaks in a sullen tone.

Lines 26-36. The prophetess asks as to who this man is who has troubled her in her quiet grave, a grave which for all these long years has been the victim of winter's snow, summer's heat, wet dews, and heavy rains. She, then, requests him to let her sleep and to take rest quietly.

37-42. Odin says that though he is unknown to her, he is called the warrior's son. He further asks her as to what there is below from which she is wearing the golden dress.

Lines 43-50. The prophetess replies that the banquet table, the goblet of foaming mead and the golden couch, which he sees, are for Balder and that he will be slain by his brother, Hoder. She is unwilling to be awakened and unwilling to speak.

Lines 51-54. Once again, Odin asks the prophetess to rise and tell him what dangers his son, Balder, has and who is the person to inflict suffering on him.

Lines 55-59. The prophetess replies to him saying that his son Balder will be slain by Hoder, his own son. She then asks her to let her sleep quietly.

Lines 60-63. At this Odin asks her to rise once again and let him know the name of one, who will avenge Hoder for his guilt of killing Balder.

Lines 64-72. Then speaks the prophetess to say that Rinda, Odin's wife, shall give birth to a child—a wonderful child—and that this child, without combing his hair, without washing his face in the stream and without seeing the setting sun, shall kill Hoder, his own brother. (This probably because of the fact that Vali or Ate, as we know him, the son of Rinda, took revenge and killed Hoder before he was a day old or had seen one setting sun). After telling this, she again expresses her desire to leave her alone to repose.

Lines 73-80. Odin asks her once again to awake and tell what these virgins (spirits representing the past, the present and the future) are. In fact these spirits are invisible to all but they

are visible to Odin and the fact that they are visible to Odin proves that Odin is a god). The spirits, as visible to him, have hair as light as flax, have snowy veils and they seem to be floating lightly in the air. After telling Odin about these spirits, the prophetess could go to rest.

Lines 81-83. Knowing that Odin has recognised these spirits, the prophetess calls him as King of Men, the mightiest of the Mighty.

Lines 84-86. Upon this, Odin, in anger, declares, that she is not the good spirit but the wicked Angerabode, the mother of the wolf-serpent and Hela.

Lines 87-94. She retorts that never again will she submit to be disturbed till the evil spirit, Lok, destroys Heaven and earth and men and gods alike and night once again reigns supreme.

N.B.—It is advised that the students may read Matthew Arnold's poem. "*Balder Dead*" which throws a good deal of light on Scandinavian mythology.

III. HYMN TO ADVERSITY

DAUGHTER of Jove, relentless power,
Thou tamer of the human breast,
Whose iron scourge and torturing hour
The bad affright, afflict the best !
Bound in thy adamant chain 5
The proud are taught to taste of pain,
And purple tyrants vainly groan
With pangs unfelt before, unpitied and alone.

When first thy Sire to send on earth
Virtue, his darling child, designed, 10
To thee he gave the heavenly birth
And bade to form her infant mind.
Stern, rugged Nurse ! thy rigid lore
With patience many a year she bore :
What sorrow was, thou bad'st her know, 15
And from her own she learned to melt at others' woe.

Scared at thy frown terrific, fly
Self-pleasing Folly's idle brood,
Wild Laughter, Noise, and thoughtless Joy,
And leave us leisure to be good. 20
Light they disperse, and with them go
The summer Friend the flattering Foe ;
By vain Prosperity received,
To her they vow their truth, and are again believed.

Wisdom in sable garb arrayed 25
Immersed in rapturous thought profound,
And Melancholy, silent maid,
With leaden eye, that loves the ground,
Still on thy solemn steps attend :
Warm Charity, the general friend, 30
With Justice, to herself severe,
And Pity dropping soft the sadly-pleasing tear.

O, gently on the suppliant's head,
 Dread Goddess, lay thy chastening hand !
 Not in thy Gorgon terrors clad,
 Nor circled with the vengeful band

35

(As by the impious thou art seen)
 With thundering voice, and threatening mien,
 With screaming Horror's funeral cry,
 Despair, and fell Disease, and ghastly Poverty :

40

Thy form benign, O Goddess, wear,
 Thy milder influence impart,
 Thy philosophic train be there
 To soften, not to wound my heart.
 The generous spark extinct revive,
 Teach me to love and to forgive,
 Exact my own defects to scan,
 What others are to feel, and know myself a Man.

45

NOTES

Introduction

Hymn to Adversity was written at Stoke in 1742. It has not been written after the style of Pindaric odes. It is conventional in form and content, yet it is an important work of Gray. It is largely indebted to Horace's "Ode to Fortune".

The theme of the poem is that adversity is a trial leading one to virtue. This hymn was composed immediately after the death of his friend, Richard West. It has, therefore, a melancholy note in it.

Analysis

Gray invokes the Spirit of Adversity, which tames the human heart and, in this way, teaches man to be virtuous and to be wise. Adversity teaches proud men as to what suffering is. Even the despotic kings do not escape from the fury of Adversity. Adversity is the eldest daughter of Jupiter, who bade her to frame the mind of her younger sister, Virtue ; who patiently heard the lesson of Adversity for many years and learnt to feel the pangs of sufferings of others. Even the pleasure-seeking and licentious men bow their heads before Adversity and the friends and pleasure-seeking flatterers of prosperous days immediately fly away. What remains is wis-

dom, always absorbed in thoughts, and melancholy, always looking down to the ground. The poet requests the goddess of Adversity not to lay her revengeful hand or show her fearful appearance like that of the Gorgon sisters to those who are already humble, but she must exert her mild influence to purify them and also to purify the poet himself, who is invoking her.

Critical Appreciation

"Hymn to Adversity" is an important Ode of Gray. It breathes a spirit of resignation and hope. Though it is an attempt of Gray's early period, it has stateliness of movement and pomp of allegorical illustration, which give individuality to his mature style.

It is a typical poem of the Augustan Age. It is conventional in form and content. It does not breathe the new spirit of romantic poetry, as we have in the other two Pindaric Odes. Giving a critical estimate of this poem, Edmund Gosse writes : "No English poet, except perhaps Milton and Shelley, has maintained the same severe elevation throughout a long lyrical piece.....The shadowy personages of allegory throng around us, and we are not certain that we distinguish them from one another. The indifferent critic may be supposed to ask, "Which is prosperity and which is folly, and how am I to distinguish them from the summer friend and from thoughtless Joy?" Adversity herself is an abstraction which has few terrors and few allurements for us and is listening to the address made to her by the poet, we are apt to forget her in our appreciation of the balanced rhythm and rich persuasive sound. The last stanza where he gets free from the allegorical personages, is undoubtedly the best, and the curious couplet about the 'generous spark' seems to me to be probably a reference to the quarrel with Walpole."

"Hymn to Adversity" is an allegorical poem. Gray wants to convey that the finest virtue that men acquire is the result of constant suffering and hardship. Some one has rightly said that "crosses are the ladders that lead us to heaven." Noble qualities of pity, charity, benevolence and wisdom come to men only when they have had a life of struggle and suffering. It is under the 'tyrant wheel of Adversity' that they become soft and kind-hearted. These are indeed the 'uses of Adversity'.

Word-Meanings and Paraphrase

St. 1. Daughter of Jove—Adversity has been called the daughter of Jupiter because both the blessings and verses are sent by Jupiter, the supreme God. **Relentless**—merciless. **Tamer**—human passions are tamed by it, and men are taught virtue. **Scourge**—whip. **Torturing hour**—the hour of punishment. (This phrase has been borrowed from Milton's 'Paradise Lost', (11). **Affright**—terrified. **Afflict the best**—torture, chasten the good people through suffering. None can escape the iron grip of Adversity, which is felt by all good or bad. **Adamantine**—hard. **Purple tyrants**—kings dressed in purple. **Arbitrary rulers**.

St. 2. Sire—according to Romans, Jupiter; according to Greeks, Zeus. In the first two lines, Gray seems to identify Adversity with Ate, the eldest of Zeus's daughters who avenge evil deeds by adversity. **She**—Virtue which is a goodly quality in man.

N. B.—Adversity is the nurse and virtue is the child. Virtue grows up as a child under the care of adversity. "Adversity doth best discover virtue."—Bacon.

St. 3. Scared—frightened. **Idle brood**—idle thoughts. **Thoughtless Joy**—people who run after light-hearted and sensuous pleasures of life.

St. 4. Sable—dark. **Arrayed**—dressed. **Immersed**—absorbed. **Rapturous thought**—deep thinking. **Leaden eye**—drooping eye. **Still**—even in the time of Adversity. **General friend**—universal friend.

St. 5. O—invocation to the goddess of Adversity. **Suppliant's**—devotee's. **Dread Goddess**—because everybody fears adversity. **Chastening**—purifying. **Gorgon**—Gorgons were three sisters of whom the eldest was Medusa who had serpents in her hair and the two others were Stheno and Euryale. All these three were terrible creatures with human faces and brazen claws. **Vengeful**—revengeful. **Mien**—appearance. **Ghastly**—dreadful.

St. 6. Benign—kind. **Philosophic train**—thoughtful virtues attending you. **Spark**—impulse, or the spark of generosity and kindness. **Myself a Man**—that one is an erring human being.

Paraphrase

(i) Adversity is the daughter of Jupiter, because both the blessings and curses are sent by Jupiter. Adversity has been addressed as a merciless Power, which tames human passions. Even the boastful persons and arbitrary kings suffer the pangs of pain and suffering and groan under the crushing wheel of Adversity.

(ii) Adversity is the eldest daughter of Jupiter, who has been sent as a nurse to take care of his child, Virtue. Adversity binds everyone with a hard chain and then inflicts punishment on him. It crushes all his pride and makes him more humane and kind.

(iii) At the advent of adversity, all the fair-weather friends and flatterers, who gathered round us, during the period of prosperity, fly away, leaving us alone to take lesson and learn wisdom.

(iv) In adversity, man has some noble virtues; of them, Wisdom is the first, who wears the black dress of mourning. The idea is that after suffering, man engages himself in deep thinking. Melancholy is the second, who is represented as a silent maid with drooping eyes. The idea is that the dejected and frustrated wear a melancholy look. Charity is the third, who is a universal friend. Justice is the fourth, who is just even to himself. And, Pity is the fifth. Pitiful hearts deem it a luxury to feel sympathy and sorrow for others.

(v) The poet requests the goddess of Adversity not to assume the form of the Gorgon sisters, who are attended by despair, disease and poverty.

(vi) The poet then requests the goddess of Adversity to present herself only in the form of a kind and merciful goddess and to endow him with gifts of generosity, love and forgiveness. He also prays to her to teach him the art of knowing his own self, so that he may know his true self.

IV. STANZAS TO MR. BENTLEY

I

IN silent gaze the tuneful choir among,
Half pleased, half blushing, let the Muse admire,
While Bentley leads her sister-art along,
And bids the pencil answer to the lyre.

II

See, in their course, each transitory thought 5
Fixed by his touch a lasting essence take :
Each dream in fancy's airy colouring wrought
To local symmetry and life awake !

III

The tardy rhymes that used to linger on,
To censurs cold, and negligent of fame, 10
In swifter measures animated run,
And catch a lustre from his genuine flame.

IV

Ah ! could they catch his strength his easy grace,
His quick creation, his unerring line ;
The energy of Pope they might efface, 15
And Dryden's harmony submit to mine.

V

But not to one in this benighted age
Is that divine inspiration given,
That burns in Shakespeare's or in Milton's page,
The pomp and prodigality of heaven. 20

VI

As, when conspiring in the diamond's blaze,
The meaner gems, that singly charm the sight,
Together dart their intermingled rays,
And dazzle with a luxury of light.

VII

Enough for me, if to some feeling breast
My lines a secret sympathy (impart;)
And as their pleasing influence (flows confest,)
A sight of soft reflection (heave the heart.)

25

NOTES

Introduction

In 1753, there was published a beautiful edition of six poems--the "Ode on the Spring", "the Death of a Favourite Cat," "Eton College", "A Long Story", "Hymn to Adversity" and "the Elegy," illustrated by a young artist named Richard Bentley, a son of a famous scholar of the same name, who was Master of Trinity College. In this connection, Mr. Gosse writes, "Bentley's illustrations consist of a frontispiece, and a full page design, for each poem, with head pieces, tail pieces, and initial letters. The frontispiece is a border of extremely ingenious rococo ornament surrounding a forest glade, in which Gray, a graceful little figure, sits in a pensive attitude... the figure is that of a young man, of small stature, but elegantly made, with a melancholy and downcast countenance."

Analysis

Gray advised Bentley's designs and addressed these complimentary stanzas to him. In this little poem, he says, with characteristic modesty, "that he does not know whether to be pleased or to blush with shame that the design can do so much for the poems, that they can give a permanent existence to each transitory thought and form and life to each of the imagination. The dragging verses that appeared so cold, so ineffectual, gained animation and caught a glow from the genuine fire of the artist. If only the poet could be inspired by the genius of the painter, his verses might be more vigorous than Pope's, more harmonious than Dryden's. But in this benighted age no single poet receives the inspiration of Shakespeare or of Milton, on whom Heaven showered all her gifts, just as no single one of the lesser gems can exhibit the dazzling blaze of the diamond."

Criticism

The last stanza is defective. It was not printed and the

only MS. copy that existed was torn when Mason received it after the death of Gray.

Word-meanings and Paraphrase

The Muse—reference is to the “Ode on the Spring” meaning the spirit of poetry. **Essence**—existence ; being. **Each dream sister art**—painting. **Awake**—reference is to the ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream,’ V. i. 15. **The energy of Pope**—“the term, ‘energy’ may be applied more appropriately to Dryden or Pope, while the word ‘harmony’ may be predicated to both.” —(Tovey). Why this suggestion has been made by Tovey appears to be for the simple reason that Gray has referred to the stately march and sounding energy of Dryden’s rhymes in “The Progress of Poesy”. **Efface**—to surpass so as to make it seem nothing. **Benighted**—ignorant.

Paraphrase

(i) Gray is in a fix. He does not know whether to be happy on the design that Bentley has supplied to the edition of his six poems or to blush with shame.

(ii) He wonders whether the designs can do much for his poems and that they could give them permanence to his transitory thoughts and life to his imaginations.

(iii) He further wonders if his tardy verses, originally appeared so cold and ineffectual, could gain life and catch a glow from the genuine fire of the artist.

(iv) Gray prays that if he could be inspired by the genius of the painter, his verse, then, might be more vigorous than Pope’s and more harmonious than Dryden’s.

N. B.—Tovey believes that the word ‘energy’ should be applied to Dryden, and the word ‘harmony’ to both Dryden and Pope.

(v) and (vi). Then Gray realizes the reality about him and accepts that no poet in his ignorant age receives the inspiration that Shakespeare and Milton received. He further compares the poets of his age with those of the Renaissance (in fact Shakespeare belonged to the Renaissance age and Milton to the post-Renaissance), and, while evaluating the two—he says that the poets of his age are meaner gems having a little charm and those of the Renaissance are blazing diamonds.

V. SONNET

ON THE DEATH OF RICHARD WEST

IN vain to me the smiling morning shine,
And redning Phoebus lifts his golden fire :
The Birds in vain their amorous descant joyn ;
Or cheerful fields resume their green attire :
These Ears, alas ! for other Notes repine, 5
A different object do these Eyes require.
My lonely anguish melts no Heart, but mine :
And in my breast the imperfect Joys expire.
Yet Morning smiles the busy Race to cheer,
And new born pleasure brings to happier Men : 10
The fields to all their wonted Tribute bear.
To warm their little Loves the Birds complain :
I fruitless mourn to him, that cannot hear,
And weep the more because I weep in vain.

NOTES

[The MS. of this sonnet is marked "At Stoke—August, 1742". It was not published till Mason included it in his Memoirs.]

Introduction

The news of the death of West deepened Gray's vein of poetry, but it did not stop its flow. He poured forth his grief and affection in some impassioned hexameters, full of earnest feeling. In no other of his poems does Gray employ quite the same personal and emotional accents, in none does he speak out so plainly from the heart. This fragment is far more familiar to general readers.

Analysis

In this small sonnet Gray speaks from his heart. No object of Nature ; the redness of the sun, the morning's smiles and the cheerful fields, attracts him. He is so much overwhelmed with grief that he weeps the more because he weeps in vain. Herein
with any other person.

Criticism

Wordsworth has criticised this small piece of composition. He writes, "Gray stands at the head of those who by their reasoning have attempted to widen the space of separation betwixt prose and metrical composition and was more than any other man curiously elaborate in the structure of his own poetic diction." This sonnet, graceful as it is, is the result of Gray's study of Petrarch. It is surely one, which is even today read with pleasure.

In this Sonnet, the stoic mood, which Gray has in the "Hymn to Adversity", is absent and grief has intensified almost into despair—"My lonely anguish melts....."

No sadder lines could ever have been written—"No heart but mine."

Composition

Gray, in this poem, practises the quatrains of alternate heroics, which later became the basis of all his harmonic effects and which he learnt to fashion with more skill than any other poet before or since.

Word-meanings and Paraphrase

Phoebus—Sun. **Amorous**—fondly with love. **Descant**—an accompaniment above and harmonising with the air. **Attire**—dress. **Repine**—to feel discontent. **Imperfect**—because his friend in no longer alive to share his joys. **And new-born pleasure brings to happier Men**—though all Nature shines in vain to Gray, yet to others who are happier than he, it brings new pleasures. **Wonted**—usual. **Birds complain**—birds sing to keep alive their love.

Paraphrase

Gray is a lover of Nature. The objects of Nature attract him always, but after the death of West, he is so much deepened with grief that these objects—the smile of mornings, the rising of the sun like a red ball, the joyful music of birds, the green fields—attract him no more. Not only have his eyes failed to appreciate their beauty, but his ears have also failed to respond to the music of birds. His eyes require a different object to soothe them, and this object is agony and melanco-

ly. Though all Nature—morning smiles, green fields shine, and birds sing to keep themselves alive to love, all these are in vain to Gray, yet, to others who are happier than he, they bring new pleasures. He weeps though he knows his friend is not there to share his sorrow. Yet he weeps and weeps, for he must. He does so because his grief has been intensified almost into despair.

VI. THE TRIUMPHS OF OWEN

A Fragment

OWEN's praise demands my song,
Owen swift, and Owen strong ;
Fairest flower of Roderic's stem,
Gwyneth's shield, and Britain's gem
He nor heaps his brooded stores,
Nor on all profusely pours ;
Lord of every regal art,
Liberal hand, and open heart.

5

Big with hosts of mighty name,
Squadrons three against him came ;
This the force of Eirin hiding,
Side by side as proudly riding,
On her shadow long and gay
Lochlin plows the watery way ;
There the Norman sails afar
Catch the winds, and join the war :
Black and huge along they sweep,
Burthens of the angry deep.

10

15

Dauntless on his native sands
The Dragon-Son of Mona stands ;
In glitt'ring arms and glory dressed,
High he rears his ruby crest.
There the thund'ring strokes begin,
There the press, and there the din :
Talymalfra's rocky shore
Echoing to the battle's roar.
Where his glowing eye-balls turn,
Thousand banners round him burn.

20

25

Where he points his purple spear,
~~Hasty, hasty rout is there,~~
Marking with indignant eye

Fear to stop, and shame to fly
There confusion, terror's child,
Conflict fierce, and ruin wild,
Agony, that pants for breath,
Despair and honourable death.

35

NOTES

Introduction

This poem is a paraphrase of "Mr. Evan's Specimens of Welsh Poetry". Owen succeeded his father Griffin, as Prince of North Wales, A.D. 1120.—(Gray). Some forty years later, he defeated the fleets of Ireland, Denmark and Norway on the shores of Anglesey. The title of the original Welsh poem is "Panegyric upon Owain Gwynedd, Prince of North Wales by Gwalchmai, the son of Melir in the year 1157."

Analysis

In the first eight lines, Gray praises Owen for his qualities of the head and heart. In the next ten lines, he describes how fighting took place. He also introduces the fine picture of the Danish ships sailing on their shadows, which may have suggested to George Canning, the celebrated simile in which he compared the power of England to that of a man-of-war. "You well know, gentlemen, how soon one of those stupendous masses now reposing on their shadows in perfect stillness, how soon, on any call of patriotism, or of necessity, it would assume the likeness of an animated thing—instinct with life and motion—how soon it would ruffle, as it were, its swelling plumage—how quickly it would put forth all its beauty and its bravery, collect its scattered elements of strength, and awaken its dormant thunder." In the lines following, the description of fighting continues—

"Where his glowing eye-balls turn,
Thousand banners round him burn.

.....
Hasty, hasty rout is there,
.....
.....

Conflict fierce, and ruin wild."

In the closing two lines, there is the agony and despair wishing for death.

Criticism

Gray began to be interested in the old poetry of Wales about 1760. In fact, Evan's book on Welsh poetry stirred him up. His poem 'The Triumphs of Owen,' as the title indicates, is the story of Owen's victory. It is a fragment but a wonderful one. It is strictly romantic.

Word-meanings and Paraphrase

Roderic's stem—Roderic, the Great Prince of all Wales in the 10th century. **Gwyneth**—North Wales. **Brooded stores**—wealth heaped up as a miser to brood over it. **Eirin**—Ireland. **Lochlin**—Danish squadron. **Plows**—ploughs. **Dragon-Son**—Owen. **Mona**—Anglesey. **Talymalfra**—a bay on the northeast coast of Anglesey. **Purple**—bloody. **Rout**—defeat. **Agony**—i.e., the agony of people on the point of death.

Paraphrase

Lines 1-8. Gray says that Owen, who succeeded his father Griffin, in the principality of North Wales, deserves all his praise for his qualities of the heart and head. He is swift, he is strong and he is brave—in all this he is in keeping with the traditional glory of Roderic, the great Prince of all Wales in the 10th century. He is not a miser to hold his wealth, nor is he extravagant in generously pouring it out. He is great, noble, broad-minded and kind-hearted.

Lines 9-18. He fought a battle and against him came three powerful fleets of Ireland, Denmark and Norway. The fleet of Ireland was hiding itself but was on its way, that of Norway was coming at a distance, but the one of Denmark sailed fast on the shadowy waters of the sea. All these fleets were proceeding through the deep sea for a war against Owen.

Lines 19-26. To face these fleets stood the fearless Owen. He stood fully armed in a glorious dress. Then began the thundering strokes along the rocky shore of Talymalfra and the echoing of the action filled the atmosphere.

N. B.—The Dragon-Son—"The Dragon is the device of Cadwallader, which all his descendants bore on the banners." Here it refers to Owen.

Lines 27-40. The fighting was so fierce that dead bodies

lay facing the earth and blood coming from the cuts added to the flow of the lake making it as torrential as it was in a river. Wherever Owen's eyes turned, the army, on his side, grew so ferocious that it made rapid advances and burnt banners. Further, his eyes caused fear to those who thought of stopping, and shame to those who tried to run away. There was all confusion, there was all ruin. This agony and despair was so great that all of them prayed for their honourable death.

UNIVERSITY QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(A) GENERAL

Q. 1—(a) Trace the development of Gray's poetic genius and of his Romantic leanings with a critical appraisal of his poetical works.

(b) Write an essay on Gray as the precursor of the Romantic movement. [B. H. U., M. A., 1963]

Or

"Eighteenth century poetry is rich in conscious echoes ; but it is richer in anticipation." Discuss giving appropriate references from the poetry of Gray.

Or

"Though he was neither rich nor copious, Gray possessed in embryo much of the taste and sentiment which was to be typical of romanticism." Discuss and illustrate.

Or

"Beginning as a classicist and disciple of Dryden, Gray ended in thoroughgoing Romanticism."—(Phelps). Discuss.

Or

"In what ways does Gray anticipate the Romantic Revival ? Give a detailed answer. [Agra, M. A., 1960]

Or

"Gray's poems are said to mirror the change of taste and the expansion of interest which took place in his time. Elucidate the statement and illustrate your answer.

Ans. 1—(a) Vide Chapter II Articles (d) and (c).

(b) Vide Chapter II Art. (e), and Chapter III, (d) and (e).

Q. 2.—(a) Trace the gradual growth of pre-Romanticism in its different strands in the age of Gray and Collins.

(b) What are the salient characteristics of Romanticism and classicism as found in English poetry and in Gray's poetry in particular ?

(c) "Gray is more closely related to his pseudo-classical predecessors than to the Romantics of the succeeding generation." Discuss.

(d) What special characteristics of eighteenth century poetry do you find in Gray ?

(e) To what extent is it correct to say that Gray did not break with existing traditions but worked with them in a fresh and original way ?

(f) Discuss Gray in relation to his age and his attitude towards his age. What are the various literary influences at work on Gray and how does he react to each ?

(g) Discuss in detail Gray's contributions to pseudo-classicism and Romanticism.

Ans. 2—(a) See Chap. I (c) and (d).

(b) See Chap. III (a), (b) (c), and (d).

(c) See Chap. II (f), (g) and Chap. III (d).

(d) See Chap. III (d), (e).

(e) See as above.

(f) See Chap. II (e), (f), (b).

(g) See Chap. III (d).

Q. 3—(a) Account for the slow and scanty output of Gray's poetry. How far is it true to say that "Gray, a born poet, fell upon an age of prose." [C. U., 1920]

(b) What are the chief characteristics of Gray's poetry ?

(c) Attempt a brief critique of Gray's poetry.

(d) "Gray, is, after all, a second-rate poet." Discuss and illustrate and indicate Gray's position in literature.

Ans. 3—(a) See Chap. V.

(b) See Chap. IV.

(c) See Chap. II (c) and Chap. VI, VII.

(d) See Chaps. IV, VI and VII.

(B) TEXTUAL

Q. 4—(a) What is a Pindaric Ode ? Characterise "The Bard" and "The Progress of Poesy" as illustrations of the type. Indicate which one of Gray's Pindaric Odes you enjoy more giving reasons

(b) ^{Gandhi Memorial College Of Education, Bantala, Jammu} Write a critical appreciation of Gray as a writer of choric Odes and make an estimate of "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard" as illustrations of the type.

(c) What are the main characteristics of the poetry of Gray as illustrated in "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard". Trace the evolution of ideas in these two Odes.

(d) Describe the tragedy of British sovereigns and the glory of Elizabethan age as depicted in "The Bard".

[C. U., B. A. Hons., 1948]

(e) What does Gray say regarding the influence of poetry on mankind, and what does he say about the progress of the poetic power from nation to nation, and mind to mind?

[C. U., B. A. Hons. 1926]

(f) Write a note on Gray's use of personifications with special reference to the 'Elegy' and his two 'Odes'.

(g) Account for the popularity of Gray's Elegy and write a critical appreciation.

[C. U., 1913]

(h) Bring out clearly the theme of Gray's Elegy.

[C. U., 1943]

Give the substance of Gray's reflections on the un-honoured dead.

[C. U., 1941]

And of the poet's epitaph.

[C. U., 1941]

(i) Write a note on the treatment of and attitude to Nature in the poetry of Gray.

[Agra, B. A., 1961]

Write your comment on his treatment of humble and rustic life.

(j) "The style of Gray aimed at, "was extreme conciseness of expression, yet pure, perspicuous and musical." Justify the statement.

[A. U., 1959]

(k) "Gray's poetry is a kind of index to the spiritual forces at work many years before they found a general outlet." Discuss.

[A. U., 1957]

(l) Institute a comparison between Gray and Collins as poets of the pre-Romantic movement.

Ans. 4—(a) and (b). See Introduction on Gray's Odes.
(c) See Chapter IV.

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It is usual to label Gray's affiliations to the pseudo-classic poetic tradition and temperament of his own age in respect of style as defects and to pre-romanticism as merits. As his poetic output was small, the few poems he wrote during the three different periods of composition have to be considered in reference to each, as the poems differ from each other in respect of language, character, value and metre. The two Pindaric Odes, viz., "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard" were composed during the second period of his poetic career. Of the merits of these two Odes, we may note the following features (discussed in Chapter IV in a general way), viz., (1) Sentiment and emotion, (2) Originality of themes, (3) Pictorial power, (4) Revived interest in Nature, (5) Music and stateliness of verse, (6) Artistic finish, (7) Evolution of thought and architectonic skill. As regards defects illustrated in the two Pindaric Odes, the following may be considered : (1) Obscurity, (2) Artificial poetic diction, (3) Personifications and allegories, (4) Rhetoric, and (5) Difficulty of form.

(d) (e) See Introduction to the two Pindaric Odes. Put together, the substance or paraphrase of stanzas 2-8 of "The Bard".

(f) Personification is a rhetoric device to invest abstract qualities or forces of Nature with concrete forms in order to give imaginative perceptions "a local habitation and a name" so as to make them vivid. When the imagination is on fire, it is natural to give a concrete form to abstract ideas. So if kept within bounds it is not merely a stylistic device ; it is of the very essence of the creative imagination of an inspired poet. A most glaring defect of the style of Gray is the mechanical, cold-blooded and uninspired personifications of abstract qualities—a fault which he shared with many of his eighteenth century poets, Collins in particular. Gosse makes the following remark : "The crowning fault is their assumption that a mythology might be formed out of the emotions of the human heart and a new Olympus be fitted out with brand-new gods of the moralist's being."

In the "Elegy," we have far too many personifications of abstract qualities, e. g., Knowledge, Penury, Grandeur etc., representing the figure "Synecdoche," i. e., abstract virtues standing for persons possessing those qualities. Except for a few,

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most of them are mechanical and uninspired, being mere imitations of old classical masters. "The Progress of Poesy" also abounds in a far larger number of lifeless and prosaic personifications than the 'Bard,' *e. g.*, "Bright-eyed Fancy hovering o'er." Examples of mechanical conformity to classical traditions may also be given from the 'Bard,' *e. g.*, "Pale Grief and pleasing Pain," "Truth severe by fairy fiction dressed", "Sullen Cares," "Frantic Passions" etc. The use of an abstract for a concrete noun often with a conscious personification, is very characteristic of eighteenth century poetry, especially of Gray. The allegorical value of such personifications is extremely doubtful as it is not poetically conceived. Evidently, Gray ran away with the idea that merely by putting an initial capital letter, a new mythology could be built up out of virtues and vices. Such lifeless personifications really interfere with the poetry and literary appreciation. There are, however, some instances which are poetically conceived as in the "Elegy", *e. g.*, "Knowledge to their eyes her ample page.....unroll", "Melancholy marked him for her own," etc. In the first example the vision of the goddess of Learning seems to be conjured up before our eyes carrying in her hand a store of learning for distribution among her votaries. Likewise, in the second example, Melancholy appears before us as a living personality—the guardian spirit of our moral being.

(g) The popularity of the 'Elegy' depends on the following—
 (1) It expresses strongly, pathetically and artistically the emotions arising out of the lives of simple country people—common sentiments of all humanity. There are few poems in English literature that express the sentiments of the author in a pathetic and tender manner and with such felicity and beauty and in perfect language. There is no originality of thought but the manner of expression is so effective and appealing that it goes straight into the heart. (2) The democratic sympathy—*i.e.*, sympathy for the poor and common people who form the bulk of humanity is also responsible for the great popularity of the poem. (3) The subject-matter, *i.e.*, simple life and lot of little known villagers is new to eighteenth century classicists. It constitutes a happy departure from the artificial manner of 18th century poets and their poetry confined to the town. (4) The harmony between matter and manner is, indeed, very striking. The note of music accords with the same End

reflections and the theme of mourning by the poet. The poem is also full of beautiful descriptions of Nature. It abounds in images which find a mirror in every mind and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo. Consult 'Critical Appreciation' of the 'Elegy' in the 'Notes'.

(h) See Notes on the 'Elegy'.

The 'Elegy' is partly a lament for morality and lost opportunity and partly a reflection on the vanity of human life. The sight of the churchyard sets the poet thinking of the life of man in relation to its inevitable end, viz., death which obliterates all human differences and brings everybody rich and poor, high and low—down to the same level. Once they are in the grave, there is not much to choose between the great and the humble. The poet reflects on the lowly lot of the rude forefathers of Hamlet who lie buried in the churchyard before him and who can no longer be touched by the simple joys of their past lives. If the ways to fame were shut against these people during their earthly career, so were the ways to crime. These are the compensations of the lot of the poor people, with whom at the end of the poem the poet identifies himself as he imagines his own fate.

(i) Gray had a strange duality. While belonging to the age by a very conscious allegiance, he was instinctively and almost unconsciously drawn towards naturalism and romanticism—towards Nature. Thus by instinctive preference he led the revolt against classical poetry—against the limitation of town poetry. This revolt was really a reaction; a discontent with classicism bred, on the one hand, on a leaning to the mediaeval and the mysterious and a desire for a return to Nature on the other. With Gray we have the beginnings of the conception of a poet as a recluse living in the country amidst the finest surroundings of natural beauty—the beginnings of the age of private meditation, not on contemporary men and events but on universal themes of life and death and on Nature. Letters to his friends also testify to the fact that he was a lover of wild Nature and that throughout his life scenes of pure Nature were sources of profound spiritual experiences.

His love of Nature is indicated by his view of a rural landscape as the poet describes the evening scene in the "Elegy".

Here the funeral aspect of the "parting day" provides a suitable background to the poet's mood of melancholy contemplation, although there is no subjective treatment of Nature as in the poetry of Wordsworth. Nature, with him, is a background to human emotions. Though he does not love Nature for her own sake he brings Nature in natural objects to echo the note of his imagination while contemplating the life of man. In his two Odes, viz., the 'Bard' and "The Progress of Poesy" we have plenty of descriptions of Nature in its rich objective variety. In his "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College", it is the natural scenery—the rural landscape—that recalls his youth. "The Progress of Poesy" introduces, at its very opening, a mighty imagery from Nature—that of a mountain current, broad, majestic and sweeping at places, tumultuous and raving at others. Besides, the lovely scenic descriptions of the Welsh mountains contribute greatly to the solemnity of the tragic lives of poets in the 'Bard'. In the 'Ode on the Spring', Gray moralises Nature. Gray's personal love for Nature appears at the conclusion of the 'Elegy', when an autobiographical element is introduced through the medium of a village rustic describing the habits of the poet himself, how he would walk at the peep of dawn on the hillside to meet the sun upon the upland lawn, stretch himself listlessly at the foot of a beech tree with hanging roots and with branches swaying gently in the wind and would pore upon the brook that babbled close by.

The democratic spirit of Gray's 'Elegy' marks the advent of a new subject-matter of Romantic poetry, dealing, as it does, with the lot of common people, hitherto excluded from poetry. In this poem he relates the artless tale of the unhonoured rustics. If circumstances prevented them from achieving great fame, circumstances also prevented them from committing great crimes. Reflecting on the clumsy memorials over their graves, the poet says that these are but poignant reminders of the vain longing of all men, however humble, to be remembered after death. The poet says that theirs is a history of lost opportunity, for, in his opinion, they were not wanting in merits. He fancies that some village-Hampdens and Miltons might lie buried before him in the churchyard. He contrasts the simple funerals of the poor with the pompous obsequies of great persons in some majestic Gothic Cathedral.

"Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise."

Gray gave to misery all he had, a tear. Thus the 'Elegy', breaks a new ground by making the lot of humble folks the subject-matter of poetry: It is this democratic sympathy of Gray in this poem which is responsible for its popularity.

(j) This is what Gray himself says about this style—"concise, yet pure, perspicuous and musical"—a remark reinforced by the neo-classical dictum about poetic diction, about style. These two utterances of Gray furnish us with the clue to his style.

The style is academical and highly scholarly in the sense that it is full of literary, historical and mythological allusions and reminiscences. It is artificial in that under the influence of the neo-classical dictum about the poetic diction enunciated by him, it deliberately adopts various artificial devices and formal elements, such as, (a) the inversion of the order of adjectives usually placed before nouns, *e. g.*, "The spirits pure, the slumbers light" (Eton Ode, 49); Scared at thy frown terrific (Hymn to Adversity, 18); placement of a transitive verb after both subject and object, *e. g.*, "and all the air a solemn stillness holds" (Elegy, 6); (b) the piled epithet, *e. g.*, "The dull cold car" (Elegy, 44), "dark unfathomed caves" (Elegy, 54); "mute inglorious Milton" (Elegy 59); "cool sequestered vale" (Elegy, 75) etc. This is a peculiar characteristic of Gray's style shared only by Collins. Perhaps he was following the classical Greek manner, as Gray is admittedly a truer and greater classicist than the so called classical writers of his age. In some instances he followed a favourite device of Milton, *e. g.*, "rapturous thought profound" (Hymn to Adversity, 26), "purest ray serene" (Elegy, line 51); (c) love of compound epithet adversely commented upon by Dr. Johnson, *e. g.*, "silver winding" (Eton Ode, 10), "ivy-mantled" (Elegy, line 9) etc.; (d) Compound Nouns, *e. g.*, "velvet green" (The Progress of Poegy, 27); "virgin grace" (Bard, 118) etc.; (e) excess of actual or nearly actual transformations of the language of the past masters of English literature into the body of his poems, *e. g.*, Cere's golden reign: "feathered King"; glittering shafts of war: crested pride; Sorrow's faded form etc.; (f) terse expressions which are obscure in meaning but striking as a musical effect, *e. g.*, sovereign of the willing

soul ; Purple light of Love ; sailing with supreme, dominion etc. ; (g) frequent use of apostrophes and antithesis, abstractions, classical allusions and grandiose periphrase for stateliness and grandeur ; personification or allegory ; excessive use of "mythological tendency" on which Edmund Gosse remarks—"The crowning fault is their assumption that a mythology might be formed out of the emotions of the human heart and a new Olympus be fitted out with brand-new gods of the moralist's being." That Gray himself was fully conscious of this shortcoming, is clear from the following extract from his letter to Masson : "I had rather some of these personages, Resignation, Peace, Revenge, Slaughter, Ambition were stripped of their allegorical garb. A little simplicity here and there in the expression would better prepare the high and fantastic stain."

Gray was a scrupulous artist, conscientious and delicate to the extreme ; it was his desire to realise in all he wrote, both the harmony of tone and the perfection of form. Of all English poets he was the most finished artist. He attained the highest degree of splendour that his pictorial style seemed to be capable of. The artistic finish of the pictorial power, the music and stateliness of his verse were the special characteristics of Gray's style. His craze for formal perfection lies at the bottom of the architectonic skill that has gone into the poetic structure built up by him in each of his poems which is logically designed with a beginning, a middle and an end, every line and phrase contributing to the total general effect. In this respect he is a far greater classicist than even Pope, the distinguishing characteristic of whose art is an exquisite poise of judgement and a sense of fitness so perfect that it transcends all mere calculation. Gray's poetic style is like Pope's ; subtler, compressed and allusive, making stringent demands on the reader's mental and intellectual resources.

(k) See Chapter I (c)

(l) A close study of the poetry of Gray and Collins both would indicate definite leanings and steady progress towards Romanticism in their later writings. Their early works contain nothing that is Romantic. They are, on the contrary, dominated by the Augustan tradition of classicism like most of the early poets of the 18th century. Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" and Collins' "Persian

Eclogues" is, as we have seen, thoroughly classical in form, style and subject-matter after the manner of the school of Pope. Likewise, Gray's first poetic efforts (Address to Ignorance, the Alliance of Education and Government) belong to the Augustan school. They are all didactic in purpose and are written in the heroic couplet. After this he wrote several lyrics—"An Ode to the Spring" and "On a Distant Prospect of Eton College," "Hymn to Adversity," "Hymn to Ignorance"—all of which are conventional in thought and diction and do not suggest the new spirit of Romantic poetry. There are traces of classicism in the later works of the two poets, viz., personifications, abstractions etc., which offer a poor substitute for flights of imagination. But both freed themselves more or less from this taint of classicism. In Gray's "Elegy", for instance, there are conventional touches though it is Romantic in mood and subject-matter (suggested by the graveyard or churchyard school of meditation led by Young's "Night Thoughts.") In Gray's "Pindaric Odes" he seems to assert himself boldly in order to free himself from the trammels of classicism till he ends in his enthusiastic study of Norse and Celtic poetry and mythology just as in Collins' "Ode on the Superstitions of the Highlands," we are on the very threshold of the Celtic revival. Even in Collins' "Persian Eclogues" there is an under-current feeling for the strange and exotic, which is distinctly Romantic. Comparing these two poets in respect of the working of their minds, we can say that Collins was less chilled by classicism and the didactic spirit, and though Gray had undoubtedly his share in taste and sentiment as a precursor of Romanticism with Collins, the latter was definitely the poet of imagination, naturalism and lyricism, who responded to the influences of the time most effectively in that it was he and not Gray, who fused and harmonized them more completely in his poetry, thereby preparing the ground for the regular Romantic revival in the latter part of the century.

Compared with Collins, Gray's lyric gift was poor beside that of Collins whose lyrics though rather uncertain in style with not a tithe of Gray's constructive skill and intellectual power, have "a fire, fitful perhaps, but still genuinely divine." It is this which places Collins far above Gray in this essential quality of lyric poetry, which is a most prominent factor of Romanticism, arising out of the individual experience and

sensibility of the writer. Anyway, the greatest works of both (*viz.*, Collins' "Ode to Evening" and Gray's "Elegy") are really very close in sentiment : both belong to the school of private meditation not on contemporary men and events but on a theme which touches the life of the common man ; and both exhibit a felicity of phrase with only this difference that the phrasing of Collins shows a touch of elfin magic, which is totally absent from Gray. Thus "the qualities of Collins and Gray in a sense supplement each other. If we omit the 'Ode to Evening' and contrast poem with poem as a whole, Collins yields to Gray ; but phrase for phrase and image against image, Gray is vastly his inferior. It was not till the 'Odes' of Keats that we find a constructive power equal to Gray's, allied to an imagination greater than Collins.

Both Collins and Gray carried on the revolt in the form and subject-matter of poetry in their use of less regular measures of Milton and Spenser, and in seeking new sources of inspiration in subjects widely removed from the prevailing themes of the life of the town and society, brought poetry out of the stuffy and artificial atmosphere of the coffee-house, the court and the ball-room and thus undermined the stronghold of the 'correct' school of Pope. Although the note of inspiration of both Collins and Gray is elegiac, it is mainly as an elegiac poet that the latter is perhaps unique and will hold a permanent place in literature, but as a lyric poet, he (Gray) is unworthy to sit at the feet of the former.

Gray and Collins, distinct enough in character to the careful critical inspector, have, to the outward eye, a curious similarity. They are contemporaries ; they wrote very little, and that mostly in the form of Odes. They both affected personation and allegorical address to a very unusual extent ; both studied effects which were Greek in their precision and delicacy ; both were learned and exact students of periods of literature, now reinstated in critical authority but in their day neglected. Yet while Gray was the greater intellectual figure of the two, the more significant as a man and a writer, Collins possessed something more thrilling, more spontaneous as a purely lyrical poet.—(Gosse).

IMPORTANT ANNOTATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

- (1) The boast of heraldry the grave. (*Elegy*)
[C. U., B. A., 1915]

Meditating on the simple lives of rustics buried in the churchyard, the poet says that they can no longer be touched by the humble joys of their past lives. While reflecting on their lowly lot, the poet passes on to the deeper issues of life and death and the vanities of life. Death obliterates all human difference and brings everybody, rich and poor, high and low, to the same level. Once they are in the grave, there is not much to choose between the great and the humble. It is much to be regretted that in spite of all this, the rich and the proud rolling in pomp and luxury should hold the lives of the rustics in contempt. Death is a great leveller. Gray exposes the vanity of life reminding the rich and the proud of the utter hollowness of high birth, temporal affluence and of the gift of Fortune—wealth, beauty, splendour, pomp and all the rest of it—as they are all reduced to nothingness with the sure approach of death.

- (2) But Knowledge.....the soul (*Elegy*) [C. U., B. A., 1916]

Continuing his reflections on the humble lot of the rustics who lie buried in the churchyard before him, the poet says that it is quite possible that on account of lack of opportunity and their dire poverty, these people could not develop all their latent powers and possibilities and they were consequently compelled to lead obscure lives, the ways to fame having been thus closed to them. Their poverty stood in the way of the cultivation of their genius by proper education. Given suitable opportunities they might have become great patriots, warriors and poets, their poverty prevented them from getting the benefits of a broad and liberal education; with the result that the accumulated learning of the ages remains a closed book to them. Poverty thus checked the free flow of their thought—their healthy and joyous feelings—their energies of mind—in the same way that frost checked the free flow of a stream.

(3) The struggling pangs..... Muse's flame. (*Elegy*.)

[C. U., B. A., 1919]

Pursuing the lowly lot of the poor rustics, the poet now describes the advantages of their poverty. It was good for them, he says, that their obscure lot prevented them from committing vicious acts in which rich people are found to indulge, e. g., securing the throne by killing others, sacrificing truth and conscience etc. If the ways to fame were closed to them, so were the ways to crime. This is Nature's compensation of the lot of these poor people, who were contented with their humble destiny, and who had no occasion for feeling a sense of shame incidental to the suppression of truth and the necessity for speaking falsehood for the attainment of their selfish ends. They had, thus, no occasion to crush what they knew to be the truth while at the same time that truth was struggling within them for expression. There are poets who are compelled to compose flattering verses in honour of the rich and influential persons to serve their personal ends. But the village people were prevented from paying their tribute of flattery and praise to the rich to gain their selfish ends because their latent poetic talents were crushed by their poverty.

(4) From Helicon's..... as they flow. (*The Progress of Poesy*).

[C. U., B. A., Hons., 1914]

The divine origin of poetic inspiration is stressed here by Gray in its time-honoured association with the sacred springs of Hippocrene and Aganippe in Mt. Helicon of Boetia, believed by the ancient Greeks to be the sources and origin of poetry. Any one who drank water from these springs, was believed to be inspired with poetic feelings. These streams flowed down the valleys below in innumerable channels. Beautiful flowers sprang upon their banks, deriving their sustenance and sweet smell from the sap sucked up from their waters sacred to the Muses. The points stressed by Gray are the divine origin of poetry which owes its rise to a mysterious gift of the spirit, its different themes and forms and the fact that it touches anything however dry and commonplace with grace and beauty.

(5) On Thracia's hills..... of his eye. (*The Progress of Poesy*.)

[C. U., B. A. Hons., 1911]

The poet is here speaking of the power of harmony to curb the turbulent passions of the human heart. He

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brings in an allegory to drive home to the mind the idea that poetry helps to cool down the passion of war and curb the instinct of the strong to victimize the weak. He refers to the old legend that Mars, the classical god of war, who was worshipped in a temple in Thrace, was said to have been once so charmed by the divine and enchanting music of the famous Thracian bards that he checked the rush and fury of his war chariot and let the terrible lance drop down from his hand. According to another legend the eagle of Zeus was lulled to sleep by the magic of the music produced by the bards; after his feathers had relaxed, his wings drooped down and his terrible beak and the fierce lashes of his eyes lost all their terror.

N.B.—Notice the excess of allegory or symbolism employed by Gray after the manner of the ancients. All these images, he tells us, are from Pindar, the greatest lyric poet of Greece, who lived from 552 to 443 B. C.

(6) Her spectres wan.....shafts of war. (*The Progress of Poesy*)
[C. U., B. A. Hons., 1971]

Gray is here speaking of God's compensation to mankind for the ills of life, real or imaginary, in the gift of poetry which elevates and uplifts man from the slough of despond or despair. It is true that God has afflicted mankind with labour, want, sickness and pain. It is also true that man suffers from many imaginary horrors of ghosts and superstitious fears of the ominous cries of birds at night. But these ills of life are amply compensated for by the joys of poetry. Just as pale ghosts and ominous birds of prey who wander freely in the darkness of night but disappear with the rising of the Sun with his shining arrows as he appears on the east, so do the ills of life fly away at the mere touch of poetry. "As sunrise is to terrors of night, so is poetry to the ills of life."—(Wheeler).

(7) Till the sad Nine.....coast (*The Progress of Poesy.*)
[C. U., B. A. Hons., 1921]

The main land, the Grecian isles and the Asiatic Greek colonies were once the favourite abode of poetry and other fine arts. All these places resounded with the musical performances of the poets and artists uptil the second century B. C. But when in about 146 B. C., Greece became a Roman province, the nine goddesses of Poesy (the spirit of poetry) left their

ancient haunts with a sad heart and went over to Italy where poetry flourished till the second century A. D., in the age of Augustus—the golden age of Roman literature. But again when the Romans degenerated and lost their ideals of liberty and courage—when Roman Emperors grew tyrannical and oppressive, when Romans revelled in riches and luxury, the goddesses of poetry left the land for the sea-girt island of England where poetry again flourished after about a thousand years.

N.B.—Notice that in tracing the evolution of poetry, Gray omits the mediaeval poetry of the French poets and the Italian Renaissance poetry of Dante and Petrarch, which immediately preceded the outburst of Elizabethan poetry in England.

- (8) The verse adorn.....throbbing breast. (The Bard.)
[C. U., B. A. Hons., 1927]

This is how the bard concludes his prophecy by holding out before all a vision of future glory before he kills himself. This is a specific reference to the allegorical poetry of Spenser dealing with the subjects of war and love, to the tragic dramatic poetry of Shakespeare had to the epic poetry of Milton and others. In the first place, romantic and allegorical poetry will deal with war and love and teach austere moral truths under the thin veil of allegory. Secondly, the great Romantic tragedies of Shakespeare will inspire generations with awe, error, horror and pity over the loss of valuable human materials which but for some "tragic flaws" in the characters of tragic heroes would have been assets to human society. Lastly, solemn epic poetry, like angels singing in the garden of Heaven, would pour forth soul-ravishing melody. Besides these, there would also be other warblings less distinctly heard from too remote in time by the bard.

- (9) Wisdom in sable.....attend. (Hymn to Adversity.)
[C. U., B. A. Hons., 1936]

Here the poet refers to the noble virtues left behind in the wake of Adversity, such as, wisdom (always lost in profound thoughts), melancholy (when so-called friends and flatterers leave us in the lurch), charity (which is extended to everyone with great warmth of feelings and sympathy), justice (which is

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severe even to one's own self), and pity (which sheds tears in sympathy with the sufferings of others).

(10) Thy form benign.....a Man. (Hymn to Adversity).
[C. U., B. A. Hons., 1959]

Here the poet appeals to the Goddess of Adversity to appear before him in her mild and merciful garb and entreats her to endow him or rather enkindle in his heart sparks of generosity—chaste feelings and noble thoughts of love and forgiveness. He prays to her to teach him the gift of self-analysis so that he may be able to observe his own defects and shortcomings calculated to offend others' feelings and to realise his own true self.

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